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ANDREW JACKSON'S SEMINOLE CAMPAIGN
OF 1818: A STUDY IN
HISTORIOGRAPHY

by

ROGER WENDELL ANDERSON


B. A. LUTHER COLLEGE, 1948

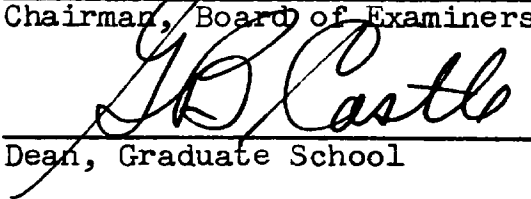
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INTRODUCTION

Since history is essentially a record of man in action, it is subject to interpretation. Controversies naturally develop from differing interpretations. Therefore, one of the most vital tasks of modern historical analysis is to present the conflicting views concerning some of these major disputes. Such studies help future historians to evaluate the events of the past more effectively. These controversies, moreover, are of particular interest to the readers of history because they involve not only significant events but also colorful characters.

Few Americans have been involved in as many controversial situations as Andrew Jackson, the frontier lawyer-soldier who became the seventh president of the United States. Some of these Jacksonian controversies are: 1) Was Jackson truly the Great Democrat, or did he merely pose as such in order to advance himself politically? 2) Was Jackson the military genius that his admirers claimed, or was he only in league with the tides of good fortune? 3) Was Jackson morally justified in seizing posts in Spanish Florida in 1818, or did he act on his own responsibility in order to further his own selfish desires? 4) Was Jackson legally justified in his Florida adventure, or did he violate the Constitution of the United States by his impulsive acts? 5) Was Jackson correct in claiming that he had received the "Rhea letter" in February, 1818, or was this famous epistle actually a hoax? 6) Was Jackson justified in bringing the government down to the level of the common man, or did the evils of the "spoils system" offset this obvious good? and 7) Was Jackson correct in killing the Bank of the United

States, or did he perform a lasting disservice to the economic well-being of his country by his action?

This study deals with the third, fourth, and fifth of the foregoing controversies. In 1817 the Georgia-Alabama frontier was being plagued by difficulties that were mainly an outgrowth of the trouble with the Creek Indians during the War of 1812. When General Jackson was directed by the War Department to rid the southern border of the menace of hostile Indians, Negroes, and foreign adventurers, his orders permitted him to cross the line into Spanish Florida, if necessary, but not to attack any Spanish garrisons. When he apparently transcended his orders by seizing several posts, he was accused of acting on his own initiative and of violating the laws of our nation.

The events that followed were influenced by the fact that the United States government was then negotiating with Spain for the purchase of Florida. The general's actions brought sharp protests from the Spanish and hindered the treaty-making that was taking place. Also, the personal popularity of the hero of New Orleans introduced political facets that could not be ignored by the leaders of that day. The discussion of the Florida invasion went through a full cycle of cabinet meetings and congressional hearings. During these lengthy proceedings, many reasons for defending Jackson were submitted. On the other hand, the critics of the hero were just as active. Several years after the affair had apparently been closed, Jackson claimed that he had received a secret authorization in 1818 from President James Monroe to seize all of Florida. This statement was brought forth in 1830-1831 in the midst of a bitter political struggle between Jackson and John C. Calhoun.

This study in historiography will attempt to review the arguments used in defense of Jackson's seizure of the posts. It will also examine the numerous criticisms levelled against the chieftain. In addition, opinions will be explored concerning the existence of the famous "Rhea letter." These goals will be accomplished by analyzing the viewpoints of the contemporary figures, and of subsequent biographers and historians. The first chapter will present the historical background of the Florida affair. This material is essential to the study because historians have been affected in their judgments by their interpretations of this background. Chapter two will deal with the views of the major characters of the Jackson era on the justification of the general. Again, later writers have been influenced by the light in which they saw these figures. Chapters three and four will offer the views of the biographers and historians from 1819 until the present. Finally, the last chapter will summarize the findings, and will attempt to indicate any changing trends in the interpretations of the writers.

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Jackson's controversial invasion of East Florida in 1818 had its roots in two chronic American preoccupations of the nineteenth century: territorial expansion, and the Indian problem.

After the purchase of Louisiana in 1803, Americans looked hungrily at Spanish Florida. In 1810 the Madison Administration acquired West Florida through dubious but effective means.¹ Inspired by this success, Madison apparently tried to achieve a similar result in East Florida in 1812 by scarcely more honorable methods.² After these efforts failed, the United States resorted to orthodox diplomacy. But, in view of the Spanish skill in delaying tactics, East Florida still had not come under American control by 1818. In January of that year, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams intensified the efforts of the United States to secure the cession of East Florida now as part of a sweeping Spanish-American settlement. At that time, Adams and Luis de Onís, the Spanish Minister, resumed negotiations for a treaty.³

While the diplomats were meeting in Washington, the Florida-

¹Abbot Emerson Smith, James Madison: Builder (New York: Wilson-Erickson, 1937), pp. 293-94.

²Julius W. Pratt, Expansionists of 1812 (New York: The Macmillan Co., pp. 79-85.

³Samuel Flagg Bemis, John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1949), pp. 301-09.

Georgia border became a focal point for Indian raids. The occasion for the trouble was the continuing Indian resentment against the Treaty of Fort Jackson. Signed on August 9, 1814, it had brought to a close the struggle of the American frontiersmen against the Creek Indians. This agreement had stipulated that the redmen would vacate about half of their domain in the Georgia-Alabama region. While the treaty had seemed harsh to some of the tribes, the majority had accepted the outcome without incident.⁴ Certain renegade Creeks, however, had fled from their Alabama homes and had joined the warlike Seminoles across the thirty-first parallel in Spanish Florida. The Indians had then carried out numerous raids in Georgia and Alabama to indicate their displeasure with the treaty.⁵

Influence exerted by foreigners also apparently intensified the hostility of the redmen toward the American whites. The Spanish authorities in Florida had sided with the Indians in their dispute with the United States. This had been evidenced as early as September 29, 1813, when Maxeo Gonzales Manxique, the governor of Florida, wrote to the Creek chiefs: "I received the letter you wrote me in the month of August, by which, and with great satisfaction, I was informed of the advantages which your brave warriors obtained over your enemies."⁶ In addition, two British subjects, Alexander Arbuthnot, an aged Scotch

⁴John Spencer Bassett, The Life of Andrew Jackson (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1916), p. 124.

⁵Ibid., pp. 234-40.

⁶James A. Parton, A Life of Andrew Jackson (3 vols.; New York: Mason Bros., 1859-1860), I, 420. This letter was found among the papers of Governor William C. Claiborne of Louisiana.

trader, and Robert C. Ambrister, a young adventurer, were allegedly using their influence to incite the warriors to dispute American authority.⁷

The antagonisms were brought to a head in 1817 by a combination of events. Fowltown, an Indian village with some particularly independent inhabitants, lay on the American side of the new line drawn by the Treaty of Fort Jackson. Its chief gave notice to the American commandant at Fort Scott, Major D. E. Twiggs, that the land taken by the Americans was his and that he would resist all attempts to deprive him of it. The commander of all the troops in this area, Brigadier General Edmund P. Gaines, treated this hostile attitude as a declaration of war, and ordered Major Twiggs with 250 men to seize the defiant chief. Twiggs reached Fowltown on November 21, 1817, and was fired upon by the Indians. The ensuing skirmish resulted in four warriors being slain and several being wounded. After reporting this action, Gaines then waited for further orders.⁸

Consequently, the Seminoles and Creeks now went on the warpath. A few days after the incident at Fowltown, a detachment of American soldiers enroute to Fort Scott was ambushed and massacred by an Indian war party.⁹ On December 2, 1817, an order was issued to Gaines to proceed against the redmen, but not to cross the Florida line.¹⁰ On December 16, a new order authorized Gaines to enter Florida if necessary, and to pursue the Indians to the Spanish posts but to stop there for further instructions.¹¹

⁷Marquis James, Andrew Jackson, the Border Captain (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1933), pp. 309-12.

⁸Bassett, Life of Jackson, pp. 244-45.

⁹William P. Cresson, James Monroe (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), p. 303.

¹⁰U. S. Congress, American State Papers, Class V, Military Affairs (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1832), I, 685-86.

¹¹Ibid., p. 689.

In the meantime John C. Calhoun had replaced Secretary of War George Graham. After acquainting himself with the situation, Calhoun transferred the command to General Jackson who, on December 26, 1817, was resting at the Hermitage. Jackson's orders were merely a repetition of those previously issued, plus the following directive: "With this view, you may be prepared to concentrate your forces, and to adopt the necessary measures to terminate the conflict which it has been the desire of the President, from considerations of humanity, to avoid, but which is now made necessary by their settled hostilities."¹²

Jackson, as commanding general of the Southern Division, had received through War Department channels a copy of the orders to General Gaines even before the command was transferred. Jackson foresaw the danger of moving his troops near the Spanish posts without being allowed to attack the garrisons. With this in view he wrote to President James Monroe on January 6, 1818:

Will you, however, permit me to suggest the catastrophe that might arise by General Gaines' compliance with the last clause of your order? Suppose the case that the Indians are beaten they take refuge either in Pensacola or St. Augustine, which open their gates to them to profit by his victory, General Gaines pursues the fugitives, and has to halt before the garrison until he can communicate with his government. In the meantime the militia grows restless, and he is left to defend himself by the regulars. The enemy, with the aid of their Spanish friends and Woodbine's [Captain George] British partizans, or, if you please, with Aury's force, attacks him. What may not be the result? Defeat and massacre. Permit me to remark that the arms of the United States must be carried to any point within the limits of East Florida, where an enemy is permitted and protected, or disgrace attends. . . Let it be signified to me through any channel (say Mr. J. Rhea) that the possession of the Floridas would be desirable to the United States and in sixty days it

¹²Ibid., p. 690.

will be accomplished.¹³

Due to the slow postal service, Calhoun's orders of December 26, 1817, had not reached the Hermitage before Jackson's letter was sent. If they had, the comprehensive nature of these War Department directives might have given the general the green light he desired and could possibly have eliminated from history the "Rhea letter" controversy.¹⁴ Such was not the case, however, and the story of the letter and its influence on politics for the next dozen years is as bizarre as a fictitious thriller.

When Jackson's letter arrived in Washington, Monroe was indisposed. After he had read "one or two lines only"¹⁵ of the letter, he handed it to Calhoun for his perusal. William H. Crawford of Georgia, the Secretary of the Treasury, now entered the room. Crawford was shown the letter, but neither he nor Calhoun commented on the contents. The missive was then "filed and forgotten by me,"¹⁶ according to the President. His alleged failure to read the letter touched off a chain of events destined to bring sorrow to himself on his deathbed thirteen years later. This apparent oversight on the part of Monroe later became the subject of considerable comment by historians.

Calhoun and Crawford were later to quarrel over the accuracy of

¹³Bassett (ed.), Correspondence of Andrew Jackson (6 vols.; Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1926-1935 (The italics are mine.)

¹⁴Richard R Stenberg, "Jackson's 'Rhea Letter' Hoax," Journal of Southern History, II (November, 1936), 480.

¹⁵Thomas Hart Benton, Thirty Years' View (2 vols.; New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1854-1856), I, 170.

¹⁶Stanislaus M. Hamilton (ed.), The Writings of James Monroe (7 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), VII, 209.

the story of the meeting in Monroe's sick room. This dispute began in 1827, and directly affected the eventual break between Calhoun and Jackson.

In the meantime, the Georgia-Alabama frontier was bustling with activity. Jackson, instead of proceeding to take command of the troops in Georgia, sent out a call for Tennessee volunteers. The general was acting on his personal responsibility, as the governor was absent at the time.¹⁷ This was "in disregard of positive orders" according to the Lacock report to the Senate in February, 1819.¹⁸ Finally, the advance guard of Jackson's reinforcements bivouacked on the bank of Big Creek, about four miles from Hartford, Georgia, on February 13, 1818. There Jackson received a packet of mail among which, he later claimed, was a letter from Rhea transmitting Monroe's authorization for the seizure of Florida. Advancing swiftly, Jackson's force seized the Spanish garrison at St. Marks on April 17, 1818. Here he also captured Arbuthnot and Ambrister, the Britishers who were accused of stirring up the Indians. These men were summarily tried and executed, much to the consternation of the Washington officials subsequently concerned with the legality of Jackson's actions.¹⁹

Returning to Fort Gadsden, Jackson prepared to go back to Tennessee. Then, "I received information that five hundred and fifty Indians had collected in Pensacola, was [sic.] fed by the Governor,

¹⁷James, The Border Captain, p. 308.

¹⁸U. S. Congress, Annals of Congress, 15th Congress, 2nd. Sess., Vol. I, 1818-1819 (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1855), 258. (Hereafter cited as U. S. Congress, Annals.)

¹⁹James, The Border Captain, pp. 313-14.

and a party furnished by the Governor had issued forth and in one night slaughtered eighteen of our citizens. . . ."20 Hence, with haste the Americans raced to Pensacola, seizing the garrison with only a minimum of resistance. The surrender of the Spanish post occurred on May 28, 1818--twenty three days after the information concerning the Indian activity at Pensacola had reached Jackson's ears. Thus, within a few weeks, Jackson had captured important Spanish posts in Florida, ousted the Spanish governor, seized the Spanish archives, and executed two British subjects.²¹

Our governmental officials were evidently unprepared for the storm that followed. Word of Jackson's deeds reached Washington during the last week of June, 1818. Monroe's reaction to the startling news was well expressed in a letter written to James Madison on July 1, 1818, the very day that he was informed at his country home at Loudon of the invasion. This missive reads in part:

General Jackson's report is received in consequence of which I shall return to Washington on Monday next, the 13th - He imputes the whole Seminole War to the interference and excitement by the Spanish authorities in the Floridas, of the Indians, together with that of the foreign adventurers imposing themselves on those people for the agents of foreign powers. I have no doubt that his opinion is correct, though, he has not made his case as strong as I am satisfied he might have done. There are serious difficulties in the business, on which ever side we view it. The motive for pressing Spain in the present state of affairs, having the Mississippi, Florida, etc., founded on the interest of the country, is not urgent, but the sense of injury from her and of insult, together with the desire of aiding the Colonies by pressing her strong.²²

²⁰Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, II, 364.

²¹James, The Border Captain, p. 315.

²²Hamilton, Writings of Monroe, VI, 53-54.

In the meantime, the Spanish representative at Washington had begun to press for action. On the night of July 7 the Spanish Minister, Don Luis de Onís, who had hurriedly returned to Washington from his summer home at Bristol, Pennsylvania, demanded that the captured posts be returned to Spain, that an indemnity be paid for all injuries and losses, and that Jackson be punished for his misdeeds.²³

Monroe now decided to call together the cabinet in order to discuss the course that the administration would follow in respect to the Florida invasion. In the cabinet meetings that ensued, Jackson's champion was the man whom the casual observer would least expect to play such a role. John Quincy Adams, the Secretary of State, alone vindicated Jackson. The new Englander was completely disgusted with Spanish insolence and the humiliating delays he had been forced to endure in the negotiations for the purchase of Florida.²⁴ An eminent American historian, James B. Schouler, offered a threefold explanation of Adams' stand:

It may have been weariness with the dragging negotiations committed to him and contempt for the Spanish monarch whose beggarly insolence tempted us to unrag him of his tattered colonial possessions; it may have been a wise forecast of Jackson's popularity at home; but unquestionably the grim Puritan, who saw through the false glitters of courts and diplomacy, owned fellowship in his heart with the warrior whose scourge had been laid so fearlessly upon the backs of our ill-disguised enemies.²⁵

Consequently, the Secretary insisted that, inasmuch as the government had granted Jackson discretionary power to enter Florida, it was respon-

²³Ibid., p. 61.

²⁴Cresson, Monroe, p. 312.

²⁵James B. Schouler, A History of the United States of America (7 vols.; New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1894-1913), III, 78.

sible for his acts.²⁶ On July 8, 1818, Adams added in a letter to Monroe that Jackson had found it necessary to take action when the Spanish governor had threatened to use force against him.²⁷

Secretary of War Calhoun principally bore the argument against Jackson. He insisted that the general had violated the Constitution by waging war against the Spanish posts.²⁸ Despite this, Calhoun later posed as a friend of the hero during the Congressional hearings and in political campaigns. These factors had political repercussions a number of years later.

The other cabinet members--Crawford, William Wirt and Benjamin W. Crowninshield--substantially agreed with Calhoun, although Crawford later stated that his own views changed moderately in the course of the meetings. Despite his previous enmity for Jackson, Crawford soon began to support the general.²⁹ This change in attitude was possibly due to his increasing fear of Calhoun as a rival aspirant for the presidency.

During these politically affected sessions, Monroe acted as "both the pacifier and director of the angry and brilliant men who formed his cabinet."³⁰ After listening to their arguments, Monroe

²⁶William H. Seward, Life and Services of John Quincy Adams (New York: Miller, Orton, and Mulligan, 1856), p. 120.

²⁷Worthington C. Ford (ed.), The Writings of John Quincy Adams (7 vols.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1913-1917), VI, 384.

²⁸Herman von Holst, John C. Calhoun, from The American Statesman Series, ed. J. T. Morse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1899), p. 98.

²⁹Parton, Life of Jackson, II, 509.

³⁰George Dangerfield, The Era of Good Feeling (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1952), p. 326.

adopted a compromise position. He decided to restore the Florida posts to Spain, and to avoid a court-martial for Jackson.³¹ The President also concluded that Adams should negotiate with Spain, which was insisting that a more satisfactory explanation be received from "Old Hickory." Moreover, Monroe assigned himself a two-fold task: to appease Jackson, whose pride had been injured by the restoration of the posts; and to persuade him to amplify the reports which he had written on June 2, 1818. These had not presented the American case adequately.³² Monroe's tactfulness made it possible for him to handle effectively the succeeding events.

The next six months were to see a repeated exchange of letters between the President and his general. On July 19, 1818, Monroe began his gargantuan task. The President realized that it would not be easy to convince the general that he had acted wisely in restoring the posts to Spain. He also realized the near-impossibility of convincing Jackson that he had overstepped the bounds of his authority. His lengthy letter was apologetic and timidly written, probably because Monroe also feared the general, and with good reason.³³ The President began by explaining

³¹Monroe had well expressed the final views of himself and the cabinet in a letter written to Thomas Jefferson on July 22, 1818: "It has appeared to be altogether improper, to hold the posts, as that would amount to a decided act of hostility, and might be considered a usurpation of the powers of Congress. To go to the other extreme has appeared to be equally improper, that is to bring General Jackson to trial, for disobedience of orders, as he acted on facts which were unknown to the government when his orders were given, many of which indeed occasion'd afterwards, and as his trial, unless he should ask it himself, would be a triumph of Spain, and confirm her in the disposition not to cede Florida." Hamilton, Writings of Monroe, VI, 63.

³²Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, II, 378.

³³James, The Border Captain, p. 318.

the necessity for the correspondence. After this meek opening, Monroe added this "punch line":

In calling you into active service against the Seminoles, and communicating to you the orders which had been given just before to General Gaines, the views and intentions of the government were fully disclosed in respect to the operations in Florida. In transcending the limit prescribed by those orders you acted on your own responsibility, on facts and circumstances which were unknown to the government when the orders were given, many of which, indeed, occurred afterwards, and which you thought imposed on you the measure, as an act of patriotism, essential to the honor and interests of your country.

The President continued by justifying the invasion of Spanish territory:

The United States stand justified in ordering troops into Florida in pursuit of their enemy. They have this right by the law of nations, if the Seminoles were inhabitants of another country and had entered to elude pursuit. . . But an order by the government to attack a Spanish post would assume another character. It would authorize war, to which by the principles of our Constitution, the Executive is incompetent.³⁴

Yet Monroe was prone to give the general every opportunity to explain his actions. He blamed "Old Hickory's" failure to communicate full details to his haste and fatigue. So in the same letter, the President suggested: "If you think proper to authorize the Secretary (Calhoun) or myself to correct those passages, it will be done with care, though, should you have copies, as I presume you have, you had better do it yourself."³⁵ Monroe wanted Jackson to be satisfied, and yet at the same time he desired to protect himself and his administration in the eyes of Congress and of Spain by mildly rebuking the impulsive chieftain. Monroe wanted Florida but he wanted it legally. He also wanted Jackson's friendship as well as the support of Congress. The President was certain

³⁴Hamilton, Writings of Monroe, VI, 55-56.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 59-60.

that the invasion of Florida was legal but he did not approve the seizing of the posts, at least not at this time.³⁶

Jackson's reaction to the letter was typical. He refused to admit that he had done anything that had not been authorized or justified. Consequently, in the reply to Monroe, written on August 19, 1818, he stated that his "orders had been comprehensive and not detailed."³⁷ He later referred to Calhoun's cryptic note of December 26, 1817—"adopt the necessary measures to terminate the conflict. . . ."³⁸ This, to the General provided grounds for justifying his actions.

Meanwhile, as the pressure from Spain eased somewhat, Calhoun adopted a more conciliatory attitude, and Monroe prepared another epistle. On October 20, 1818, the President wrote:

I was sorry to find that you understood your instructions relative to operation in Florida differently from what we intended. I was satisfied, however, that you had good reason for your conduct, and have acted in all things on the principle. By suggesting that you understood them as we did, I concluded that you proceeded on your own responsibility alone, in which, knowing the purity of your motives I have done all I could to justify the measure. I well knew, also, the misconduct of the Spanish authorities in that quarter, not of recent date only.³⁹

As Monroe was anxious for Jackson to make his own case stronger, he added:

The best course to be pursued seems to me for you to write a letter to the Department, in which you will state that, having reason to think that a difference of opinion existed between you and the Executive, relative to the extent of your powers, you thought it due to yourself to state your view of them, and on

³⁶Bassett, Life of Jackson, pp. 243-44.

³⁷Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, I, 395.

³⁸Ibid., II, 342.

³⁹Hamilton, Writings of Monroe, VI, 74.

which you acted. This will be answered, so as to explain ours, in a friendly manner by Mr. Calhoun, who has very just and liberal sentiments on the subject. This will be necessary in the case of a call for papers by Congress, as may be. Thus we shall all stand on the ground of honor, each doing justice to the other, which is the ground on which we wish to place each other.⁴⁰

Calhoun now was brought into the picture as the peacemaker rather than the antagonist. This seemingly minor bit of deceit was to play a dominant role in the political dispute that followed several years later.

Although somewhat mollified by Monroe's smooth talk, Jackson never-the-less stuck to his guns on the matter of justification. In a letter written on November 15, 1818, he protested his affection for the President and in the same breath insisted that he had acted only for the good of his country. Jackson was convinced that the proposed correspondence with the Secretary of War would prove his point, so he agreed to begin writing his views.⁴¹ Later, in his message to Congress on November 16, 1818, Monroe defended Jackson's action.⁴² The general then wrote that he "highly approved"⁴³ the President's message, signifying that the men had reached a mutual understanding. The chain of letters between the two men ended on December 21, 1818, when Monroe wrote that the proposed correspondence with the Secretary of War would be unnecessary.⁴⁴ This indicated that the President felt that the general's

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 75.

⁴¹Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, II, 398.

⁴²James D. Richardson (ed.), Messages and Papers of the Presidents (11 vols.; Washington: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1900), II, 611.

⁴³Hamilton, Writings of Monroe, VII, 171.

⁴⁴Ibid.

position was solid at that time. This series of documents, which contained not one hint of a presidential authorization through John Rhea, was to be of major importance to historians.

During the negotiations between Monroe and Jackson, Congress reconvened for a "lame duck" session. As might be expected, both Houses prepared to examine the invasion of Florida. Hence, the ensuing Congressional activities had important future ramifications from the political standpoint. On December 18, 1818, a senatorial committee consisting of Abner Lacock (Pa.), John Henry Eaton (Tenn.), John Forsyth (Ga.), Rufus King (N. Y.), and James Burrill, Jr. (R. I.), was appointed to examine the Seminole proceedings.⁴⁵ Lacock, the chairman, was a quiet and dignified Pennsylvanian who cared not one whit for Jackson's threat to "cut off the ears" of critical senators.⁴⁶ The presence on the committee of John Henry Eaton, Jackson's close friend and erstwhile biographer, did not prevent the group, after a careful study of all available data, from returning a report critical of "Old Hickory's" deeds.⁴⁷ Eventually, on February 24, 1819, their findings were read before the Senate. In part the committee declared:

It is with regret that the committee are compelled to declare that they conceive General Jackson to have disregarded the positive orders of the Department of War, the Constitution and laws. . . . Your committee will dismiss this branch of the subject by observing that, consistently with the character and genius of our government, no officer however high or exalted his station, can be justified for an infraction of the Constitution; it is an offense against the sovereignty of the nation, this sovereignty being vested in the

⁴⁵U. S. Congress, Annals, p. 76.

⁴⁶James, The Border Captain, p. 325.

⁴⁷U. S. Congress, Annals, pp. 255-68.

great body of the people.⁴⁸

The lengthy report went on to chide Jackson--"We hope better things of the distinguished officer at the head of our armies, and we had hoped better things of the hero of New Orleans, but we have been disappointed. . ."⁴⁹

The report infuriated Jackson, and the support of his admirers tended to increase his feeling against the committee. The administration gracefully forestalled any action until the session of Congress closed, and, as the question was not brought up again in the Senate, the Lacock report served no other function than to widen the breach between Jackson and his outspoken critics.

The administration was unable to curb the House, however. On January 12, 1819, the House Committee on Military Affairs submitted a series of resolutions disapproving the Jacksonian treatment of the Florida affairs, after a resolution praising Jackson's actions had failed in committee by only one vote.⁵⁰ Early sentiment preceding the House debates indicated that Jackson would have powerful support as well as eloquent antagonists. The ensuing debate, which lasted several weeks, became the principal item on the House's daily agenda. The most vociferous critic of the old soldier was Henry Clay. Although the Kentuckian protested that he had nothing personal against the general, he proceeded to tear "Old Hickory" apart verbally.⁵¹ This earned Clay the undying

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 258-59.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 266.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 518.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 631-55.

hatred of Jackson. On the other hand, the most gifted speech in defense of the chieftain was by Representative George Poindexter of Mississippi.⁵² After the lengthy debate, Jackson was absolved on all counts, and the Congressional probe ended.⁵³

Several years later, Jackson's invasion of Florida became entangled in contemporary politics. The ensuing partisan developments have influenced the appraisals of historians in their consideration of the events of 1818, and hence must be treated at some length. During a political quarrel with Calhoun in 1827, Crawford made reference to the Carolinian's role in the cabinet meetings of July, 1818.⁵⁴ While Jackson was not directly and immediately informed of Crawford's charges, the feuding politicians were certain to bring them to his attention. When Jackson was elected in 1828 with Calhoun as his running mate, he again heard hints of Calhoun's duplicity in the affair, but he did not believe them to be true.

As early as 1826 a letter from Monroe to Calhoun had been made known to Jackson. This note, written on September 9, 1818, had criticized Jackson's conduct, but Jackson did not believe that his Vice-President had agreed with Monroe.⁵⁵ Then during the January 8 celebration in New Orleans in 1828, commemorating Jackson's victory over the British in 1815, Colonel James A. Hamilton of New York and Major William B. Lewis of Tennessee heard rumors that Crawford had accused Calhoun of wanting to

⁵²Ibid., pp. 935-85.

⁵³Ibid., p. 1138.

⁵⁴Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun (3 vols.; Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1944-1951), II, 76-79.

⁵⁵Basset, Life of Jackson, p. 501.

court-martial the general in 1818.⁵⁶ On the way home Hamilton decided to go by way of Georgia and speak to Crawford. As the latter was not home, Hamilton asked Governor John Forsyth to carry a message to Crawford, requesting information on the position of Calhoun in 1818. Soon Hamilton received a letter from Forsyth confirming the rumors about Calhoun's anti-Jackson stand. Lewis now decided to keep the letter secret until after the election in November in order to protect Jackson's chances of winning.⁵⁷

As the tension between the Jacksonians and Calhoun increased during the first months of the new administration, Lewis informed "Old Hickory" of the matter. Jackson demanded to see the Forsyth letter but permission had to be received from both Forsyth and Crawford. This was not granted until April 30, 1830, when Crawford wrote to the President.⁵⁸

Crawford's letter arrived at a time inopportune for the Vice-President. His relations with Jackson were continuing to deteriorate from the combined effects of Martin Van Buren's ambitions,⁵⁹ the Eaton affair,⁶⁰ and the nullification controversy.⁶¹ Consequently, after reading Crawford's charges, Jackson immediately wrote to Calhoun

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 502-05.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 506-07.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 508-09.

⁵⁹Edward M. Shepard, Martin Van Buren, from The American Statesman Series, ed. J. T. Morse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1899), p. 187.

⁶⁰Margaret L. Coit, John C. Calhoun: American Portrait (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1950), p. 193.

⁶¹Wiltse, Calhoun, II, 112-13.

demanding an explanation.⁶² Rather than take the normal recourse of maintaining cabinet secrecy, Calhoun proceeded to pen such lame excuses that Jackson closed off their correspondence and their friendship.⁶³

"Old Hickory" wrote to the Vice-President on May 30, 1830:

In all your (previous) letters to me (you have) professed to approve. . .entirely my conduct in relation to the Seminole campaign. . .Your letter now before me is the first intimation that you ever entertained any other opinion. . .Understanding you now, no further communication with you on this subject is necessary.⁶⁴

As Jackson and Calhoun feverishly prepared to defend themselves, the almost forgotten "Rhea letter" reentered the picture. In the course of the renewed discussion over Jackson's authorization to seize the Spanish posts, the veteran Tennessean claimed that he had received the desired acquiescence from the President through the medium of John Rhea.⁶⁵ Jackson insisted that the letter had been received while he was on the march to Florida and had been duly burned on April 12, 1819, upon the request of Monroe given through Rhea.⁶⁶ When questioned by Calhoun, Monroe denied having sent such approval. Although Monroe was aged and feeble, his memory was apparently clear.⁶⁷

John Rhea now found himself in a position that was highly impor-

⁶²Bassett, Life of Jackson, p. 509.

⁶³Parton, Jackson, III, 333.

⁶⁴Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, IV, 140-41.

⁶⁵Parton, Jackson, II, 435.

⁶⁶Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, IV, 232-35.

⁶⁷Arthur Styron, The Last of the Cocked Hats: James Monroe and the Virginia Dynasty (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1945), p. 352.

tant and, at the same time, unenviable. Previously, Rhea's moderate fame had rested on two pillars. He was deemed an "intimate and confidential friend of General Jackson."⁶⁸ And, while serving almost continuously from 1802 to 1823 as a typically Republican representative from Tennessee, he had been able to boast that "he had not been absent from the House a single day."⁶⁹

Rhea's maneuvers in 1831 did not enhance his fame. Although he was anxious to help his old friend, he was unable to recall the full particulars of his role in 1818. He wrote at least three letters to Jackson before he was able to recall all that the general desired, and he did not succeed "till he received some important promptings."⁷⁰ The first of these letters from Rhea to Jackson was written on January 4, 1831, and read in part: "I desire to have something to bring matters fully to my recollection, for at that time (January, 1818) I was. . . occupied with the business before the committee on pensions and revolutionary claims." In the same letter Rhea added defensively: "Say nothing of me in this business until I speak out as fully as I can, and therefore this letter is so far confidential, CONFIDENTIAL."⁷¹ As might be expected, later writers were to make an issue of Rhea's hesitation.

On June 3, 1831, the second "Rhea letter" was finally written. While the first one of January, 1818, has never been found, this letter

⁶⁸Parton, Jackson, II, 436.

⁶⁹Marguerite B. Hamer, "John Rhea of Tennessee," East Tennessee Historical Society Publications, No. 4 (January, 1932), 38.

⁷⁰Bassett, Life of Jackson, p. 248.

⁷¹Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, IV, 221-22.

has been kept for posterity. Rhea began by protesting his loyalty to Monroe, but insisted that the ex-President must have been affected by a lapse of memory. Rhea implored, "you did receive that letter from Andrew Jackson and you will so write to me. . .you did communicate confidentially to me, you approved of the opinions of Andrew Jackson by him so stated in the Confidential letter and did authorize me to write to him. I did accordingly write to him."⁷²

This letter could not be left without making a suitable answer. While Monroe was incapacitated at the time of its receipt, his advisers deemed it necessary to acquaint him with its contents. When confronted with Rhea's accusation, Monroe wrote:

It is utterly unfounded and untrue that I ever authorized John Rhea to write any letter whatever to General Jackson, authorizing or encouraging him to disobey, or deviate from the orders which had been communicated to him from the Department of War. It is utterly unfounded and untrue that I ever desired the said John Rhea to request General Jackson to destroy any letter written by him, the said John Rhea, to General Jackson nor did I at any time wish or desire that any letter, document, or memorandum, in the possession of General Jackson or any other person, relating to my official conduct, in respect of the Seminole War, or any other public matter, should be destroyed.⁷³

Despite its obvious importance, this statement by Monroe, signed on June 19, 1831, was not made public. Jackson himself did not know definitely of the declaration until several years later, although he had been told that the ex-President had strongly denied Rhea's allegations.⁷⁴

The aged statesman died soon after and the matter was not brought

⁷²Hamer, East Tennessee Historical Society Publications, No. 4, p. 43.

⁷³Hamilton, Writings of Monroe, VII, 230.

⁷⁴Schouler, "The Jackson and Van Buren Papers," Atlantic Monthly, XCV (February, 1905), 220-25.

up again, probably because the quarrel that had precipitated this correspondence was lessening. Rhea also died shortly after the denial. The use of the first "Rhea letter" in justifying Jackson's Florida adventure has since been debated by a number of biographers and historians.

With this historical background in mind, it remains to be seen exactly what the views of contemporaries and historians have been concerning the matter. Was Jackson justified in seizing the Spanish posts in 1818? If so, on what grounds may the action be defended? Did the first "Rhea letter" give Jackson that "green light" which he had sought in his letter of January 6, 1818? Was the "Rhea letter" ever actually written or was it manufactured later for political purposes? The views of major contemporaries on these questions will be stated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

CONTEMPORARY VIEWPOINTS

When General Jackson seized the Spanish posts of St. Marks and Pensacola, he aroused considerable interest throughout the country. The interest was especially intense in the nation's capital, where the leading figures of the day debated the issue. Jackson's admirers insisted that the old hero was justified in his movements while his enemies were equally vehement in indicting him. Several widely differing viewpoints, pro and con, were expounded by the major contemporaries. These opinions were influenced by political and personal factors, of course.

The views of the contemporaries have had a profound effect on later writings. It should be understood that historians have used these contemporary discussions extensively in formulating their own analyses of the affair. In addition, these critics have been influenced by their personal opinions of the leading players in the Florida drama. Consequently, the following pages will present not only the views of the major contemporaries on the justification of Jackson and on the existence of the "Rhea letter," but also brief character sketches of the principal participants.

Jackson himself strongly believed that his actions in Florida were completely justified. But, as the editor of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine wrote some years later, the Tennessean "appears to have had the faculty of believing exactly what he wished to believe, not in the ordinary limits, but to the extent of being actually possessed by a

thorough conviction."¹ Similarly an eminent twentieth century historian has written that "there was little to set him apart from the rest, except a passionate idiosyncrasy, a conviction that he was always right, which, enforced by an imaginative temperament and a fierce will, transformed him into the most generous of friends and the most remorseless of enemies."² And Jackson's most judicious biographer has even added: "There is no record that Jackson ever changed an opinion once formed, whatever the proof offered to him."³

The complexity of Jackson's character was further explained by an historian of the nineteenth century who wrote: "He was narrow, ignorant, violent, unreasonable; he punished his enemies and rewarded his friends. But he was, on the other hand--and his worst opponents hardly denied it--chaste, truthful, and sincere."⁴ Other historians have also illustrated the widely differing views of the hero in terms that were equally candid.⁵

¹"President Andrew Jackson" Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, XCI (May, 1862), 661.

²George Dangerfield, Era of Good Feeling (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1952), p. 123.

³John Spencer Bassett, The Life of Andrew Jackson (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1916), p. 463.

⁴Thomas W. Higginson, "Old Hickory," Harpers, LXIX (July, 1884), 275.

⁵For example, James Parton, after a year of research on Jackson, made the following comment: "Andrew Jackson, I am given to understand, was a patriot and a traitor. He was one of the greatest of generals, and wholly ignorant of the art of war. A writer brilliant, elegant, eloquent, without being able to compose a correct sentence, or spell words of four syllables. . . A stickler for discipline, he never hesitated to disobey his superior. A democratic autocrat. An urbane savage. An atrocious saint." Parton, Jackson, I, vii. Similarly Thomas Perkins Abernethy made this rather frank comment about Jackson and his influence:

During the crisis, "Old Hickory" himself used several different grounds in explaining his attack on the Spanish posts. As previously noted, Jackson had been instructed to pursue the enemy to the forts, but to do nothing more without first notifying the War Department. The general firmly believed that the misconduct of the Spanish officers had justified his action. In a letter to Secretary of War Calhoun on May 5, 1818, he wrote:

The duplicity of the Spanish Commandant of St. Marks, in professing friendship towards the United States while he was actually aiding and supplying her savage enemies, throwing open the gates of his garrison to their free access, appropriating the King's stores to their use, issuing ammunition and munitions of war to them, and knowingly purchasing of them property plundered from the citizens of the United States, is clearly evinced by the documents accompanying my correspondence.⁶

Jackson went on to strengthen his case by saying:

I trust, therefore, that the measures which have been pursued will meet with the approbation of the President of the United States. They have been adopted in pursuance of your instructions, under a firm conviction that they alone were calculated to insure peace and security to the southern frontier of Georgia.⁷

This indicated that Jackson felt at the time that the comprehensive nature of Calhoun's orders of December 26, 1817, had covered the situation.

Later, on May 29, 1818, the general issued a proclamation to his troops in which he affirmed his stand:

"No historian has ever accused Jackson the great Democrat, of having had political philosophy. It is hard to see that he even had any political principles. He was a man of action, and the man of action is likely to be an opportunist. Politically speaking, Jackson was certainly an opportunist." Abernethy, "Andrew Jackson and the Rise of Southwestern Democracy," American Historical Review, XXXIII (October, 1927), 76.

⁶U. S. Congress, American State Papers, Class I, Foreign Relations (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1834), IV, 601.

⁷Ibid., p. 602.

The immutable laws of self-defense, therefore compelled the American Government to take possession of such parts of Florida in which the Spanish authority could not be maintained. Pensacola was found in that situation, and will be held until Spain can furnish Military [sic] strength sufficient to enforce existing treaties.⁸

Four days hence in an official report to Calhoun, Jackson further based his position "on the immutable principles of self-defense authorized by the law of nations and of nature, on the fact that the Spanish officers had aided and abetted the Indian enemy and thereby became a party in the hostilities against us. . . ." ⁹ Yet, when informed that Adams was defending him on the basis of similar theories expounded by authorities on international law, Jackson allegedly exploded: "D--n Grotius! D--n Pufendorf! D--n Vattel! This is a mere matter between Jim Monroe and myself."¹⁰

Also on June 2, 1818, Jackson wrote to Monroe:

I shall be happy to hear from you, in all things, I have consulted publick good and the safety and security of our Southern frontier. I have established peace and safety, and hope that the government will never yield it, should my acts meet your approbation it will be a source of great consolation to me, should it be disapproved, I have this consolation, that I exercised my best exertions and Judgt., and that sound national policy will dictate holding possession as long as we are a republick.¹¹

This letter was endorsed in the margin by Monroe, "he hopes that his conduct will be approved, which shows that he acted on his own responsibility."¹² The President, however, neglected to affix the date of

⁸Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, II, 375.

⁹U. S. Congress, Annals, p. 622.

¹⁰Helen Nicolay, "A Democratic Despot," Century, XCII (August, 1916), 605.

¹¹Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, II, 378.

¹²Ibid.

endorsement to the note.

Thus, we see that Jackson explained his actions on the basis of 1) the comprehensive nature of his orders, 2) the misconduct of the Spanish officers, 3) the principle of self-defence, and 4) the approval of the government. The latter point was negative in essence. The general insisted that the administration had actually agreed with his plans of January 6, 1818, by failing to reject them.

Another vital figure in the Florida affair was President James Monroe. Monroe, a Virginia planter, had been educated at Princeton, and had served briefly in the Revolutionary War. In addition, he had been a congressman, governor of his home state, an ambassador to foreign lands, and a cabinet member under his old friend, James Madison.¹³

Monroe's moral stature as a public official has been widely debated. An admirer said of him: "Mr. Monroe has not been estimated at his full worth in the public opinion of this generation. He was in truth one of the great men of our history."¹⁴ Thomas Jefferson once remarked about Monroe that "he was a man whose soul might be turned inside out without discovering a blemish to the world."¹⁵ A more recent student of the Monroe era said: "Monroe was a good man. His motives were not lofty, but they were pure."¹⁶ On the other hand, James Parton

¹³William P. Cresson, James Monroe (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), pp. 123-273.

¹⁴Joshua Leavitt, "James Monroe and His Administration," Harpers, XXIX (September, 1864), 462.

¹⁵Higginson, "Era of Good Feeling," Harpers, LXVIII (May, 1884), 937.

¹⁶Dangerfield, Era of Good Feeling, pp. 96-97.

saw Monroe as "one of those gentlemen who are clay in the hands of such a potter as Andrew Jackson."¹⁷

Monroe's position was indeed a peculiar one. It must be remembered that the United States was anxious to acquire East Florida. Our government was beginning to question the right of Spain to hold a colony that it could not control. Monroe's views on this subject had been expressed in his message to Congress on January 13, 1818:

For these injuries, especially those proceeding from Amelia Island, Spain would be responsible if it was not manifest that, though committed in the latter instance through her territory, she was utterly unable to prevent them. Her territory, however, ought not to be made instrumental, through her inability to defend it, to purposes so injurious to the United States. To a country over which she fails to maintain authority, and which she permits to be converted to the annoyance of her neighbors, her jurisdiction for a time necessarily ceases to exist.¹⁸

This statement, one must remember, was made before General Jackson made his move against the Spanish garrisons. Monroe insisted that the United States had the right to pursue its enemy into Florida on the principle of self-defence, but he reiterated the fact that Jackson's orders had directed him to respect the authority of the Spanish government.¹⁹

That Monroe was aware of the misdeeds of the Spanish officers was shown in his letter to Madison on July 1, 1818, part of which was cited in chapter one.²⁰ Thus, the President recognized the role of the foreign officials although he did not believe that Jackson had made the

¹⁷Parton, Jackson, II, 356.

¹⁸James D. Richardson (ed.), Messages and Papers of the Presidents (11 vols.; Washington: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1900), II, 593.

¹⁹Ibid., II, 600-01.

²⁰Refer to Chapter I, p. 10.

case as clear as he might have.²¹ Monroe was not willing to condemn the Spanish government for the misconduct of a few of her representatives. Yet he believed that if she could not control her officials she should give up the colonies.

Consequently, as the July cabinet meetings opened, the President's first thought was to placate Spain by restoring the forts. He also wanted a more satisfactory explanation of the activities of his general. Monroe had desired to annex Florida by legal means, and this idea was still uppermost in his mind. On the other hand, the President was well aware of Jackson's popularity, and apparently was seeking a sound basis for justifying his behavior. Yet Monroe's position in the cabinet meetings was one of opposition to the actions of the old hero, although he was not as definite in his opinions as were Calhoun and Crawford. When the decision was made to restore the posts to Spain, it is significant to note that all of the participants in the sessions attempted to defend the actions of the general. But as late as July 20, John Quincy Adams wrote in his diary: "The President heard with candor and good humor all that I said, but without any variation from his original opinion, and my draft of a note to Onís, with all its amendments, was finally fixed precisely on the grounds of the President's original sketch."²²

While eager to appease Spain, Monroe was not prone to punish Jackson in any way. The President stated these opinions in a letter to

²¹Stanislaus M. Hamilton (ed.), The Writings of James Monroe (7 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), VI, 53.

²²Charles Francis Adams (ed.), Memoirs of John Quincy Adams (12 vols.; Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1875), IV, 114.

Thomas Jefferson, written on July 22, 1818.²³

As the months passed, Monroe appeared to mellow towards the hero of New Orleans. In his second annual message to Congress on November 16, 1818, he mentioned the aid given by Spanish officials to the Indians as the reason for the decision of "Old Hickory" to capture the garrisons. He emphasized tactfully, however, that Jackson's orders to invade Florida had taken care not to encroach upon the rights of Spain, but that the presence of Spanish arms in Indian hands justified the general's move.²⁴ In the same address Monroe stated: "The commanding general was convinced that he should fail in his object, that he should in effect accomplish nothing, if he did not deprive those savages of the resources on which they had calculated and of the protection on which they had relied in making the war."²⁵ This indicated that the President was now more inclined than he had been in July to justify the chieftain, although he still insisted that the return of the posts to Spain had been the only course available to the government.²⁶

Meanwhile, Monroe had apparently eased his own mind on the matter when he penned the following lines to Madison on February 7, 1819:

Had Gen. [sic] Jackson been ordered to trial, I have no doubt that the interior of the country would have been much agitated, if not convulsed, by appeals to sectional interests, by imputations of subserviency to the views of Ferdinand, of hostility to the cause of the colonies, etc., nor have I any doubt that Spain, deriving confidence and courage from these divisions, would have

²³Refer to Chapter I, p. 13.

²⁴James Monroe, Monroe's Messages on Florida (Boston: Directors of the Old South Work, 1902), pp. 73-79.

²⁵Richardson, Messages and Papers, II, 611.

²⁶Ibid., II, 612.

found new cause to persevere in her procrastination and equivocating policy. . . .If a general in executing orders in a campaign against an enemy should not make just discriminations in all instances between enemies and others I do not consider him as committing a breach of the Constitution. If the government sets the affair right in other respects there is no breach, although he is not punished for his mistake.²⁷

The President thus hinted that politics had played a role in the decision of the cabinet to absolve the general from blame on charges of violating orders or the Constitution. He also indicated that the negotiations with Spain for the cession of Florida were not going well.

This latter situation had not improved by November 24, 1819, when Monroe wrote to Madison that the government would have to take Florida, under the terms of the treaty, of course, if Spain did not ratify soon.²⁸ This proved his anxiety to add Florida to the United States.

Yet, in spite of his outward tolerance of the general's deeds, Monroe never wavered in his belief that Jackson had transcended his orders. A decade later, he wrote to Calhoun on March 16, 1828:

The Seminoles alone were mentioned, and the war with them would have been as much terminated by driving them into the Spanish posts, as by taking the posts, unless Spain, by justifying the shelter thus afforded them, became a party to the war, and, in which case, it would have assumed a new character, and acquired a new force. The order given to General Gaines, which was binding on General Jackson, was adequate to the end, without making such attack.²⁹

This was written in response to Calhoun's request for information to help clear up some details concerning the South Carolinian's quarrel

²⁷Hamilton, Writings of Monroe, VI, 88.

²⁸Ibid., VI, 105.

²⁹Ibid., VII, 158.

with Crawford over the items discussed in the cabinet meetings of July, 1818.

Two days later, on March 18, 1828, Monroe further stated his position in a letter to Major Henry Lee. The former President intimated that he had never considered Jackson authorized, from the orders given, to take the Spanish posts. After the deed was accomplished, and the general had explained his interpretation of the orders, however, Monroe backed "Old Hickory." The Virginian then laid the blame principally on the Spanish officers for their misconduct.³⁰

Thus while Monroe now tended to condone the movements of his impulsive chieftain, he was at the same time insistent that he considered the general to have acted on his own responsibility. With an eye to diplomacy, the President insisted upon the return of the captured posts to Spain. At the same time, Monroe had his thoughts trained on the sectional repercussions that might have been aroused had he erred in any phase of the issue. In the final analysis, the United States acquired Florida from Spain by treaty, while the old hero remained somewhat dubious about the faith and trust of his chief executive.

Now the opinions of the individual cabinet members will be considered. Secretary of War John C. Calhoun led the opposition to Jackson. Calhoun, a South Carolinian, had been a member of the War Hawks, the group that had urged war against England in 1812. A Yale-educated Southern gentleman, Calhoun was destined to become the champion of the cause of states-rights in this country.

The Secretary, the most recent addition to the cabinet, refused

³⁰Ibid., VII, 165-66.

to accept the principle of self-defence. He insisted that Jackson had violated the Constitution and had brought us dangerously close to war with Spain. Adams noted in his diary on July 13, 1818: "Mr. Calhoun is extremely dissatisfied with General Jackson's proceedings in Florida; thinks Jackson's object to produce a war for the sake of commanding an expedition against Mexico, and that we shall certainly have a Spanish war."³¹ Later Adams wrote: "Calhoun, the Secretary of War, generally of sound, judicious, and comprehensive mind, seems in this case to be personally offended with the idea that Jackson has set at nought the instructions of the Department."³² On July 20³³ the New Englander added that it was Calhoun who principally bore the argument against him. The Carolinian insisted that the capture of Pensacola was not necessary upon principles of self-defense. Therefore, according to Calhoun, it was both an act of war against Spain and a violation of the Constitution.³⁴

But when he finally backed down in the cabinet fight, Calhoun wrote to Jackson on September 8, 1818, indicating that he had been a staunch supporter of the general. The South Carolinian said that he, as well as every other member of the administration, had agreed with Jackson that Florida was important to the security of the Southern frontier.³⁵ In addition, Monroe's letter to Jackson on October 20, 1818, indicated

³¹C. F. Adams, Memoirs of J. Q. Adams, IV, 107.

³²Ibid., IV, 108.

³³Calhoun had also hinted that Jackson was involved in land speculation in Florida, but this charge was never proved. Ibid., IV, 115.

³⁴Ibid., IV, 113.

³⁵Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, II, 393.

that Calhoun had "just and liberal sentiments on the subject."³⁶ Therefore, the general was certain that the South Carolinian had been his friend during the cabinet proceedings. It is no wonder that Jackson was surprised and angered when informed several years later of the Secretary's exact role. When confronted with the Tennessean's demands for an explanation of the position he had taken in 1818, Calhoun responded on May 27, 1830:

The questions involved were numerous and important: whether you had transcended your orders; if so, what course ought to be adopted; what was the state of our relations with Spain, and, through her, with the other European powers; a question, at the time, of uncommon complication and difficulty. These questions had all to be carefully examined and weighed, both separately and in connection, before a final opinion could be wisely formed; and never did I see a deliberation in which every point was more carefully examined, or a greater solicitude displayed to arrive at a correct decision. I was the junior member of the cabinet and had been but a few months in the administration. As Sec. [sic] of War, I was more immediately connected with the questions whether you had transcended your orders, and, if so, what course ought to be pursued. I was of the impression that you exceeded your orders, and had acted on your own responsibility; but I neither questioned your patriotism nor your motives. Believing that where orders were transcended, investigation as a matter of course, ought to follow, as due in justice to the government and the officer, unless there be strong reasons to the contrary, I came to the meeting under the impression that the usual course ought to be pursued in this case, which I supported by presenting fully and freely all the arguments that occurred to me.³⁷

One must remember that in 1830 Jackson was putting the pressure on his Vice-President in order to discredit him completely. Calhoun was now fighting for his political life. The Carolinian knew that the President could break him if he so desired. Jackson might have admired Calhoun to some extent if he had stated his position more positively. This, however,

³⁶Hamilton, Writings of Monroe, VI, 75.

³⁷Richard K. Cralle (ed.), The Works of John C. Calhoun (6 vols.; New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1856-1857), VI, 371.

marked the termination of the speaking relationship between the two men.

Next the attitude of Secretary of the Treasury William H. Crawford must be considered. The Virginia-born Crawford had been an enemy of Jackson since he had opposed the general's Indian policy under the Treaty of Fort Jackson.³⁸ Therefore, it was easy for Jackson to assume that Crawford had been his chief enemy in the cabinet. The Georgian, a personable man who appealed to a large segment of the population, had his eye on the Presidency. His road to the White House was blocked mainly by Calhoun and Jackson. In 1816 Calhoun, who also had designs on the Presidential chair, had supported Monroe in opposition to Crawford. The South Carolinian had feared the rise of a rival from his own section of the country.³⁹ In 1818 Crawford was just as fearful of the rising political possibilities of the general. At that time Crawford felt that he would be the rightful successor to Monroe in 1824, so his views in the cabinet sessions were undoubtedly colored by his desire for the nomination.⁴⁰

At the cabinet meetings Crawford said that if the administration did not immediately declare itself and restore Pensacola, it would be held responsible for Jackson's having taken it, and for having commenced a war in violation of the Constitution.⁴¹ According to Adams, however,

³⁸J. E. D. Shipp, The Giant Days: The Life and Times of William H. Crawford (Americus, Georgia: Southern Printers, 1909), p. 150.

³⁹Ibid., p. 152.

⁴⁰Margaret L. Coit, John C. Calhoun: American Portrait (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1950), pp. 139-40.

⁴¹C. F. Adams, Memoirs of J. Q. Adams, IV, 109.

Crawford's viewpoints were influenced by factors other than indignation over an apparent violation of the Constitution. The New Englander penned in his diary on January 7, 1818:

It happens, unfortunately, that Crawford's interest and stimulus of personal ambition, prematurely roused by his having started as a candidate for the Presidency against Mr. Monroe at the late election, now pushed him not only to contribute in running down Jackson as a formidable rival but even to counter-act, as much as is in his power, the general success of the Administration, and particularly that of the Department of State.⁴²

Later, during the squabble with Calhoun which began in 1827, Crawford stated that his views had undergone a material change after the cabinet meetings had opened. In a letter to John Forsyth written on April 30, 1830, the Georgian asserted that Jackson's letter of January 6, 1818, had been brought up during the cabinet sessions. Although Monroe had not previously read it, he now produced it. Crawford indicated that he felt that the general should be excused because the silence of the President had meant consent. Then, according to the Georgian, Calhoun proposed punishment. When questioned concerning this, Monroe and every other member of the cabinet believed that Crawford's memory had deceived him.⁴³ Therefore, Crawford's change of attitude between 1818 and 1830 may have been prompted by the desire to help crush his old enemy, Calhoun.

Consequently, the defense of Jackson in the cabinet meetings was borne solely by Adams. The Secretary of State was the son of the ex-President, and a Bostonian not inclined to sentimentality. The learned New Englander made this lengthy entry in his diary in July 15,

⁴²Ibid., IV, 214.

⁴³Parton, Jackson, II, 509-10.

1818:

The President and all the members of the Cabinet, except myself, are of the opinion that Jackson acted not only without, but against his instructions; that he has committed war upon Spain which cannot be justified, and in which, if not disavowed by the Administration, they will be abandoned by the country. My opinion is that there was no real, though an apparent, violation of his instructions; that his proceedings were justified by the necessity of the case, and by the misconduct of the Spanish commanding officers in Florida. The question is embarrassing and complicated, not only as involving that of an actual war with Spain, but that of Executive power to authorize hostilities without a declaration of war by Congress. There is no doubt that defensive acts of hostility may be authorized by the Executive; but Jackson was authorized to cross the Spanish line in pursuit of the Indian enemy. My argument is that the question of the constitutional authority of the executive is precisely there; that all the rest, even to the order for taking the Fort of Barrancas by storm, was incidental, deriving its character from the object, which was not hostility to Spain, but the termination of the Indian war. This is the justification alleged by Jackson himself, but he also alleges that an imaginary line of the thirty-first degree of latitude could not afford protection to our frontiers while the Indians could have a safe refuge in Florida, and that all his operations were founded on that consideration.⁴⁴

Adams' viewpoints had apparently been formed from the beginning, for the week before the meetings commenced he had signified to Monroe that he justified Jackson's actions in view of the necessity of the situation and by the misconduct of the Spanish officers.⁴⁵ On July 20 the Puritan made the following entry:

Looking over General Jackson's letters, it struck me there was a new point of view in which his conduct in taking Pensacola was defensible, and at the Cabinet meeting I presented it again, and argued it with all the force I could. It appeared to make some impression upon Mr. Wirt, but the President and Mr. Calhoun were inflexible.

My reasoning was that Jackson took Pensacola only because the Governor threatened to drive him out of the province by force if he did not withdraw; that Jackson was only executing his orders

⁴⁴C. F. Adams, Memoirs of J. Q. Adams, IV, 108.

⁴⁵Worthington C. Ford (ed.), The Writings of John Quincy Adams (7 vols.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1913-1917), VI, 384.

when he received this threat; that he could not withdraw his troops from the province consistently with his orders, and that his only alternative was to prevent the execution of the threat.⁴⁶

Adams thus insisted that Jackson should have been defended because the general's attack on Pensacola was made only after the Spanish commandant, José Masot, had threatened to use force to evict the American troops. The Spanish representative in Washington admitted, on July 11, 1818, that the Pensacola governor had acted without being thoroughly aware of Jackson's intentions.⁴⁷ This hedging on the part of Onís was enough of an opening for Adams and the rest of the supporters of Jackson. The Secretary of State went on to say:

I insisted that the character of Jackson's measures was decided by the intention with which they were taken, which was not hostility to Spain, but self-defence against the hostility of Spanish officers. I admitted that it was necessary to carry the reasoning upon my principles to the utmost extent it would bear to come to this conclusion.⁴⁸

Later, of course, Jackson turned against his only defender after the political campaign of 1824.⁴⁹

Attorney-General William H. Wirt was apparently only an interested auditor during the Cabinet meetings. There is little evidence, even in the comprehensive Adams diary, that he said anything except when queried on a point of constitutional law. From what has been cited before,

⁴⁶C. F. Adams, Memoirs of J. Q. Adams, IV, 113.

⁴⁷Adams wrote on this date: "Mr. Onís, the Spanish Minister, called on me at my house to talk of the negotiation. He was more tractable on the subject of Pensacola; said General Jackson had misunderstood Governor Masot's allusion to force; that he had only meant to say that if Jackson attacked him he would repel force by force." Ibid., IV, 106.

⁴⁸Ibid., IV, 113.

⁴⁹James Truslow Adams, The Adams Family (New York: The Literary Guild, 1930), p. 172.

however, we know that he sided with the anti-Jackson faction, although he was not as decided in opinions as were Calhoun and the President.

The views of ex-Presidents Jefferson and Madison should also be examined briefly. In a letter written to Albert Gallatin on November 18, 1818, Jefferson stated:

In the first moment, indeed there was a general outcry of condemnation of what appeared to be a wrongful aggression. But this was quieted at once by information that it (Pensacola) had been taken without orders and would be instantly restored; and although done without orders, yet not without justifiable cause, as we are assured will be satisfactorily shown.⁵⁰

Jefferson thus recognized the possible justification of the general.

Later, on March 3, 1819, he wrote to Madison that he had never doubted the justification of the temporary occupation of the Spanish posts.⁵¹

Madison expressed himself in a note to Monroe on February 13, 1819:

It would be a happiness also, if the subject as it relates to Gen. [sic] Jackson could have an issue satisfactory to his feelings and to the scruples of his friends and admirers. Mr. Adams has given all its lustre to the proof that the conduct of the Gen. [sic] is invulnerable to complaints from abroad: and the question between him and his Country ought to be judged under the persuasion that if he has erred it was in the zeal of his patriotism, and under a recollection of the great services he has rendered.⁵²

The cabinet members were not the only ones interested in the matter. The floor of the House of Representatives provided a fertile ground for the major portion of the oratory on the Seminole proceedings. As has been previously noted, the resolutions censuring the old hero were defeated in the House, but some rather significant viewpoints were

⁵⁰Paul Leicester Ford (ed.), The Writings of Thomas Jefferson (10 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), X, 115.

⁵¹Ibid., X, 124-25.

⁵²Gaillard Hunt (ed.), The Writings of James Madison (9 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), VIII, 421.

expressed by congressmen during this lengthy debate. The arguments, pro and con, will be considered separately.

To begin with, on January 12, 1819, the House Committee on Military Affairs, under the chairmanship of Thomas M. Nelson (Va.), resolved that the proceedings in Florida be condemned by the House as a whole as a violation of the Constitution.⁵³ It is significant to note again, however, that the minority of the Committee, headed by Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky, had asserted that the general should have been given a vote of thanks rather than a threat of censure.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, Henry Clay of Kentucky led the attack on Jackson in the House. The erstwhile War Hawk insisted that he had no personal feeling against the general. On the contrary, he was sincerely and profoundly grateful to the man who had preserved American honor during the War of 1812. But, Clay averred, as a friend of the Constitution, he could not possibly approve Jackson's lawless conduct in Florida.⁵⁵ The Kentuckian warned against defending Jackson on the basis of his reputation:

Are former services, however, eminent, to preclude even inquiry into recent conduct? Is there to be no limit, no prudential bounds to the national gratitude? I hope gentlemen will deliberately survey the awful isthmus on which we stand. They may bear down all opposition; they may even vote the general the public thanks; they may carry him triumphantly through this House. But if they do so, it will be a triumph of the military over the civil authority, a triumph over the powers of this House, a triumph over the Constitution of the land. And I pray most devoutly to Heaven that it may not prove, in its ultimate

⁵³U. S. Congress, Annals, p. 518.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 527.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 631-32.

effects and consequences, a triumph over the liberties of the people.⁵⁶

Joseph Hopkinson (Pa.) then expressed the common view that Jackson had overstepped the limits of his authority. The Pennsylvanian said that such matters should be handled by the government and not by a military commander.⁵⁷

William Lowndes (S. C.), who at the time was living with the Calhouns at Dumbarton Oaks and was closely linked politically with his fellow-South Carolinian, emphasized this same point, and went on to explain the reasons for Jackson's action. Considering it clear that there was no military necessity for the occupation of St. Marks and Pensacola, the brilliant Carolinian believed that "Old Hickory's" moves were political in nature. He asserted that the general's correspondence corroborated this statement.⁵⁸ Yet it is significant to note that one year later when Spain was still delaying the ratification of the Florida treaty, Lowndes, speaking for the Committee on Foreign Relations, recommended that Florida be occupied as an indemnity for spoliations.⁵⁹

John Tyler (Va.) based his address primarily on the wrong done to the land. Early in his speech he remarked: "I am no apologist for Spain; her wrongs are numerous and great. But, I will never cease to protest against this violation of the Constitution."⁶⁰ Later, the

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 655.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 875.

⁵⁸U. S. Congress, Annals, pp. 915-19.

⁵⁹Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun (3 vols.; Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1944-1951), I, 210.

⁶⁰U. S. Congress, Annals, p. 929.

Virginian expressed a thought quite prevalent in these anti-Jackson orations: "Oh, no, sir, I for one, feel no enmity toward him; I am an enemy of no man, but I trust I am a friend to the Constitution and the law."⁶¹ Although Tyler in 1833 joined the Whigs who were formed in opposition to "King Andrew I," his split with the general was not completed until Jackson's stands on nullification and the Bank had antagonized him.⁶² According to his biographer, there was no evidence that Tyler opposed Jackson in 1819 on any ground other than a sincere conviction that the general had erred.⁶³

Representative William Fuller (Mass.) attacked the defense that Jackson's orders were comprehensive enough to cover his movements. He stated:

Suppose, then, the order was broad enough to warrant him in marching to Florida, and attacking the Indians, without regarding the conditions to which General Jackson had been restricted; in other words, without the necessity of pursuing invaders or punishing depredation. This is conceding much to a liberal construction of the General's military power.⁶⁴

Fuller was referring to political factors later when he said, "let me earnestly entreat gentlemen to discard from their bosoms such considerations-to forget that the 'hero of New Orleans' is the officer concerned."⁶⁵

Another military man, William Henry Harrison (Ohio), believed

⁶¹Ibid., p. 934.

⁶²Oliver Perry Chitwood, John Tyler (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1939), pp. 112-13.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 39-40.

⁶⁴U. S. Congress, Annals, p. 992.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 1006.

that Jackson had erred honestly, but:

His conduct, in relation to the Spanish posts, was unauthorized by the President; that the President considered it an unconstitutional act is evident from his having agreed to restore them to Spain without the authority of a law of Congress. If these posts were a legal acquisition to the arms of the United States, the President could no more surrender them by his own authority than we could restore to Britain the frigate, Macedonian, or any other capture made during the war.⁶⁶

Others who spoke against Jackson were Thomas M. Nelson, Charles F. Mercer, and Edward Colston (Va.), Thomas Cobb (Ga.), Henry R. Storrs (N. Y.), Philip Reed (Md.), and Thomas S. Williams (Conn.). Cobb, in particular, did not believe that Jackson should have been defended on the basis of the international law of self-defense. The others based their argument mainly on Jackson's transcending of orders and his consequent violation of the Constitution.⁶⁷

It is significant to note that of the men who spoke out against Jackson, several were destined to continue to oppose him throughout his political career. Clay and Harrison became prominent leaders of the Whigs, and Tyler also joined that party after his break with Jackson in 1833. Lowndes was a close friend of Calhoun, and Cobb was allied with Crawford. Of the others, Hopkinson, Storrs, and Colston were ex-Federalists who were unsympathetic with the liberal beliefs of the old hero,⁶⁸ while the remainder were Democrats, whose views might have been influenced partially by personal convictions.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 1031.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 583-97.

⁶⁸Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1928), pp. 1113-14, 1577, 835.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 993, 1352-53, 1505, 1450, 1708.

On the other hand, George Poindexter of Mississippi, who made perhaps the best defense of Jackson in the House, first of all questioned the right of that body to even attempt to censure Jackson. He reasoned that Jackson had been ordered by the President to enter the territory of Florida. Therefore, the Chief Executive should have accepted the responsibility for the actions of his general.⁷⁰ The Mississippian later went on to blame Spain for Jackson's present woes:

Yes, sir, the territory of Florida is emphatically a country 'open to all comers!' The British found a hearty welcome there during the late war. The outlawed Creeks received the right hand of fellowship from Governor Masot, and his retinue of official dignitaries; fugitive negroes and banditti are welcome guests, when associated in arms against the United States; and I am persuaded the devil himself would have received Holy orders, had he made his appearance at Pensacola in the character of a foe of this country. We alone were excluded from the high privilege of meeting our enemies on that soil which was prostituted to every purpose which could in any manner subserve their views, and contribute to our annoyance.⁷¹

The position of Congressman John Rhea (Tenn.) must also be considered. The man who was destined to play a greater role in this affair in 1830-1831 stated:

General Jackson was authorized by the supreme law of nature and nations, the law of self-defence, corresponding with the great national maxim, namely, the safety of the people is the supreme law, to enter the Spanish territory of Florida in pursuit of, and to destroy, hostile, murdering savages, not bound by any obligation, who were without the practice of any moral principle reciprocally obligatory on nations.⁷²

The testimony of James Tallmadge of New York indicated that men who were not from the Southwest also supported the general. The New

⁷⁰U. S. Congress, Annals, p. 961.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 964.

⁷²Ibid., p. 867. Also see p. 870.

Yorker averred that the discretionary nature of his orders fully justified Jackson.⁷³ In addition, Lemuel Sawyer (N. Y.) justified Jackson by "one law at least, the force of which all are ready to admit--self-preservation."⁷⁴ David Walker (Ky.) also made this rather startling comment:

If Gen. Jackson had returned from the Florida line, is there a woman in Georgia, or a child in Alabama, that does not know that Arbuthnot and Ambrister would have excited their myrmidons to the repetition of those deeds, at the thought of which the blood curdles and runs cold with horror?⁷⁵

Others who defended Jackson primarily on the principle of self-defense and on the comprehensive nature of his orders were John Holmes (Mass.), Richard C. Anderson, Jr., and Joseph Desha (Ky.), Alexander Smyth, Philip Barbour, George F. Strother, Hugh Nelson, and John Floyd (Va.), Felix Walker (N. C.), Francis Jones (Tenn.), Henry Baldwin (Pa.), and James Ervin (S. C.).

Ervin summed up the feelings of the pro-Jacksonians in the last speech of the debate:

Most unfortunate of unfortunate men! If he does not march into Florida, he disobeys the orders of his superiors, and his commission or his life may be forfeit. If he does, and encounters difficulties, dangers, and almost starvation itself, in an honest endeavor to promote the interest and glory of his country, he meets the frowns of the representatives of the very people whom he has been endeavoring to benefit.⁷⁶

A few facts concerning the supporters of Jackson appear to be worthy of note. Richard M. Johnson, who had opposed the resolution as

⁷³Ibid., p. 717.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 783.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 1008.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 1132.

a member of the Military Affairs Committee, was handpicked by "Old Hickory" as Van Buren's running mate in 1836.⁷⁷ James Ervin of South Carolina was a protectionist, and therefore in natural opposition to Calhoun.⁷⁸ Barbour of Virginia and Baldwin of Pennsylvania were appointed by Jackson in 1830 to a federal judgeship and to the Supreme Court, respectively. The former was also later named by Jackson as an associate justice of the Supreme Court. This selection was confirmed by the Senate in 1836.⁷⁹ Strother of Virginia became receiver of public moneys in St. Louis in 1820, a position which he held until 1840. This fact was remarkable in view of the spoils system of the Jacksonian era.⁸⁰ Most of the other supporters were southwestern Democrats who were sympathetic with the procedures against Spain.

With the speeches concluded, the House proceeded to bring the affairs to a close. The resolution that the seizure of the Spanish posts was contrary to the Constitution of the United States was again placed before the House.⁸¹ In its subsequent voting the House rejected the resolution by a margin of one hundred to seventy, thereby upholding the actions of the general.⁸² Meanwhile, the acquittal in the House greatly increased Jackson's popularity, and soon he was involved in

⁷⁷Marquis James, Andrew Jackson, Portrait of a President (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1937), p. 414.

⁷⁸Biography of American Congress, p. 948.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 669, 665.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 1582.

⁸¹U. S. Congress, Annals, p. 1138.

⁸²Ibid.

politics.⁸³ After serving a short time as Governor of Florida in 1821, he was sent to the Senate in 1823. After being defeated by Adams in the controversial election of 1824, he was successful in winning his way to the White House four years later. Calhoun was his Vice-President. As previously noted, the political quarrels between Calhoun and Crawford, and later between Calhoun and Van Buren, revived the positions of the members of the Monroe Cabinet on the Seminole affair. Finally aware in May, 1830, of the exact role of Calhoun in the matter, the President attempted to strengthen his own position by releasing his statement that the desired secret authorization had been received from Monroe through Rhea. Jackson asserted that while on his way to Fort Scott, in February, 1818, he received from Rhea the expected assurance, and that it was in consequence of that information that he had carried his army boldly into Florida. He also asserted that he had preserved Rhea's letter until the Seminole controversy of the succeeding winter became warm. Then, on April 12, 1819, he had burned the letter at the request of Rhea, who said that he urged it at Monroe's solicitation.⁸⁴

Before the viewpoints of the contemporaries on the existence of the "Rhea letter" have been examined, some facets concerning this strange episode should be listed. These possibilities all have arisen in the testimony given in 1831 and later: 1) that the letter was a political invention by the Jacksonians to discredit Calhoun; 2) that it was an outright fabrication by Rhea; 3) that it was actually written through Rhea's misunderstanding of some remark made by Monroe; 4) that

⁸³Bassett, Life of Jackson, p. 287.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 246-47.

there was falsehood by either Jackson or Monroe; 5) that there was a failure of memory by either Jackson or Monroe; 6) that Jackson misunderstood remarks by Rhea which referred to another matter (the channeling through Jackson of all War Department orders to subordinates); or 7) that Jackson merely interpreted Rhea's letter of January 12, 1818, in the light of his own desires. Now, beginning with Jackson, the cases of the principal characters will be presented.

Jackson's story, which has already been presented in part, has been best set forth during the preparation of an exposition against Calhoun in February, 1831. The general proclaimed:

I received the answer to my confidential letter of the 6 January, 1818, from Monroe, through J. Rhea, on my way to Fort Scott, after I left Hartford, Georgia. It may be proper to remark that, when I wrote my confidential letter to Mr. Monroe, I had no idea that I would be ordered to Florida.⁸⁵

Concerning the disposition of the letter, "Old Hickory" went on to say:

When I arrived in the City Mr. Calhoun and Mr. Monroe treated me with great apparent politeness, and after the vote in the House, and about the adjournment of Congress, Mr. Rhea came to my lodgings from the President's, and asked me if I had received his confidential letter in reply to mine to Monroe on the 6th day of January, 1818. I told him that I had received it on my march to Fort Scott. He then asked me where it was, and I replied that it was with my confidential letters safely locked up at home. Mr. Rhea then said to me I have waited upon you, with the request of Mr. Monroe, to which I add my own as a friend and brother Mason, that you would burn it. Having full confidence in the friendship of Mr. Monroe and Mr. Rhea, and not fearing but that if it became necessary its contents would be admitted, and the House of Representatives having, by a large majority, approved my conduct, and it being suggested by Mr. Rhea that Mr. Monroe was fearful, my health being delicate, that the letter would fall into the hands of my executors, I yielded to the request, and promised that on my return home I would burn it. Accordingly on the 12th of April, 1819, in the presence of Mr. Saml. Overton, I did burn it, and made a memorandum of the fact on the margin of my letter book, opposite to that part of the

⁸⁵Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, IV, 232.

letter which alluded to Mr. Rhea.⁸⁶

To those who accepted Jackson's word as gospel, this statement was enough to document the existence of the "Rhea letter." Unfortunately, however, Monroe did not corroborate the story. As early as December 28, 1827, in a letter to Calhoun, Monroe had established his position:

The circumstances attending the letter alluding to an understanding with Mr. Rhea, I presume you will recollect. I never read it until after the affair was concluded, nor did I afterwards think of it until you recalled it to my recollections, by an intimation of its contents, and a suggestion that it had also been read by Mr. Crawford, who had mentioned it to some persons who might be disposed to turn it over to some account of that period. . . . I asked Mr. Rhea, in a general conversation whether he had ever intimated to General Jackson his opinion that the Administration had no objection to his making an attack on Pensacola, and he declared that he never had. I did not know if the Gen. [sic] had written to him to the same effect that he had to me, as I had not read his letter. . . . that he might have led me innocently into a conversation in which, wishing to obtain Florida, I might have expressed a sentiment from which he might have drawn that inference. But he assured me that no such conversation ever passed between us. I did not apprise him of the letter which I had received from the Gen. [sic] on the subject, being able to ascertain my object without doing it.⁸⁷

This statement would seem to disprove the "Rhea letter" theory, but the political controversy of 1830-1831 brought further requests for added proof from Monroe. He was unwilling to speak out in the Calhoun-Crawford dispute, but he was insistent that he was right on the "Rhea letter" incident. In February of 1831, he wrote again to Calhoun:

I mention this in strict confidence, the defect of my memory alone is a strong argument against my statement of anything relative to the conduct of the individual members, further than what relates to the letter of Gen. [sic] Jackson, which stands on its own peculiar ground, and asserts what was not done and to which, had it been done, being a party, as was asserted, I could not have forgotten.⁸⁸

⁸⁶Ibid., IV, 235.

⁸⁷Hamilton, Writings of Monroe, VII, 139.

⁸⁸Ibid., VII, 226.

However, Monroe appeared to hedge in a note to Adams on March 11, 1831:

Jackson especially requested in it an informal sanction from Gen. [sic] Rhea and without which, in the spirit of the letter, none could be inferred. Besides what is the fair import of the letter? He does not ask an official authority from me. He asks only my consent as an individual and evidently with an intention not to compromit [sic] me, even in that character. The letter, therefore, had it been answered, and the sanction been given, was an affair of confidence between him and me, never to be disclosed. On what principle it can be relied on as an authority to attack the posts, and to make me responsible for it, I cannot conceive.⁸⁹

The second "Rhea letter" of June 3, 1831, and the subsequent denunciation by Monroe have been covered.⁹⁰

After the death of the Virginian, his son-in-law and secretary, Samuel L. Gouverneur of New York, published a statement denying that Monroe had ever authorized Rhea to answer Jackson. Gouverneur said in part: "There is no shape in which the facts alluded to has ever reached the eye or ear of Mr. Monroe that it has not been contradicted. It is as his representative and upon his authority that I contradict it."⁹¹

One must remember, however, that while Monroe and Gouverneur issued positive statements of denial, Jackson was just as definite in his affirmation of the existence of the secret authorization. In addition, the Tennessean was supported by John Rhea, Judge John Overton, and the redoubtable Major Henry Lee.

The statements of these three men must also be considered. The behavior of Rhea in respect to the dispute was certainly peculiar. After

⁸⁹Ibid., VII, 228.

⁹⁰Refer to Chapter I, pp. 22-23.

⁹¹Parton, Jackson, II, 528-29. This statement was found in the New York Courier and Enquirer, October 1, 1832.

the opening of the hearings in Congress, Rhea wrote to Jackson on December 18, 1818: "I will for one support your conduct, believing as far as I have read that you acted for public good."⁹² This might lead the reader to believe that Rhea knew nothing of the "Rhea letter."

Later Rhea was willing to support his old friend, General Jackson, but was unable to remember the particulars in the case. His letters to the chieftain on January 4, 1831,⁹³ and March 30, 1831,⁹⁴ requested help in recalling the facts. Finally, his positive assertion of the existence of the controversial letter led to Monroe's equally positive denial on June 19, 1831.⁹⁵

Judge Overton, a long-time friend of Jackson, also supported the general's assertion, but in a manner equally vague. On June 2, 1831, the same day that Jackson gave full particulars to Rhea, Overton wrote to the general:

I recollect when writing the pamphlet defence of the Executive and his commanding Gen. [sic] in relation to the Seminole War, in 1818, that upon the requesting from you, minute information, on every point connected with the campaign, that you furnished me with your orders etc., and placed before me your confidential letter to Mr. Monroe, being a copy of one transmitted, to him as you stated, with Mr. John Rhea's letter in his handwriting, which, in substance conveyed the idea, that he had conversed with the President, who showed him your confidential letter; that he approved of your suggestions, etc.⁹⁶

When Jackson requested information from Major Henry Lee, who was

⁹²Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, II, 404.

⁹³Ibid., IV, 221-22.

⁹⁴Ibid., IV, 254-55.

⁹⁵Hamilton, Writings of Monroe, VII, 230.

⁹⁶Bassett, Correspondence of Jackson, IV, 287-88.

on a mission to Paris, he received the following reply in September, 1832: "My answer to this inquiry is that I have a distinct recollection. . . .that you burnt the letter. . . ."97

On the other hand, the members of the Monroe cabinet had little to state about the existence of the "Rhea letter." Calhoun and Crawford virtually had nothing to say about it, but the loquacious Adams had a very definite viewpoint. In a lengthy entry in his diary on August 30, 1831, the New Englander averred:

Jackson's excessive anxiety to rest the justification of his invasion of Florida upon a secret, collusive, and unconstitutional correspondence with Mr. Monroe can be explained only by an effort to quiet the stings of his conscience for the baseness of his ingratitude to me. Writhing under the consciousness of the return which he has made to me for saving him from public indignation and defending him triumphantly against the vengeance of Britain and Spain, the impeachment of Congress, the disavowal of Mr. Monroe and the Court-martial of Calhoun and Crawford, he struggles to bring his cause before the world and before posterity upon another basis. This basis is itself as rotten as his own heart. It is, that his conquest of Florida was undertaken and accomplished, not, as I had successfully contended for him, upon principles warranted by the law of nations and consistent with the Constitution of the United States, but by a secret fraudulent concert between him and Mr. Monroe, in direct violation of the Constitution and of all its conservative principles. To establish this, he resorts to his own unprincipled letter, which I never saw; to the recreant desperation of Crawford, and to the ravenous imbecility of John Rhea; he has succeeded with them both--both have made themselves, by impudent, unblushing falsehoods, panders to his unnatural passions; and to glut his revenge upon me, for benefits such as he never received from any other man, he has been laboring not only to blast the good name of Monroe, but to cover with infamy his own. His moral conceptions are so confused and discomposed by his convulsive passions, that in his eagerness to throw off his obligations to me and to ruin the reputation of Mr. Monroe, he blinds himself entirely to the inevitable recoil upon himself. It is fortunate that Mr. Monroe lived and retained his faculties to make a solemn and authentic declaration of the total falsehood of John Rhea's abominable statement.⁹⁸

⁹⁷Ibid., IV, 472.

⁹⁸C. F. Adams, Memoirs of J. Q. Adams, VIII, 404-05.

The testimony of the major contemporaries has been examined. Now it remains to be seen what the biographers and historians have said after research and reflection on the question.

CHAPTER III

PRE-WORLD WAR I VIEWPOINTS

Many biographers and historians have examined Jackson's Florida adventure. Their interpretations have involved the justification of the actions of the general as well as the existence of the "Rhea letter." This chapter will consider the views of the major writers from the time of the Seminole campaign until the outbreak of World War I. It will be noted that while a few of the authors have dealt with both phases of the problem, some have mentioned only the aspect of justification, and still others have merely given attention to the "Rhea letter." In addition, several writers omitted the controversies completely in their works. To begin with, the views of the biographers of Jackson will be examined. Then, the opinions of the biographers of those major contemporaries who played supporting roles will be presented. And, finally, the writings of the historians of the era will be considered.

Of the numerous authors of the pre-World War I period who undertook the task of writing a biography of Jackson, very few gave attention to the Seminole incident. Actually, the only major work of that era was by James Parton, a professional writer who prepared a three-volume life of the hero of New Orleans. The other efforts were, in the main, single-volume biographical sketches. The brevity of these books undoubtedly explains in part the failure of the authors to delve deeply into the details of the life of Jackson. In addition, one must consider

the fact that Jackson's side of the Florida story was not fully known until Thomas Hart Benton completed his autobiography in 1854. At that time Jackson's "Exposition against Calhoun," actually written in 1831, was first made public when Benton printed the text of it.¹ Nevertheless, some of the comments of these early writers are worthy of mention in this study.

As early as 1819, S. Putnam Waldo completed a brief memoir of the general's career. While the work was finished too soon to include the congressional reaction to the invasion or, of course, the later discussion over the "Rhea letter," Waldo did comment on the justification of the hero. He believed that the defense of the actions of the general was founded on two basic factors. First, he cited the misconduct of the Spanish officials. Second, he believed that the alleged sheltering of hostile Indians in Florida presented a constant menace to the frontier settlers. Waldo vividly defended the invasion:

The Spanish government had palpably violated their treaty with America; and if thirteen years more of negotiations were to be spent, the Alabama Territory, the frontiers of Georgia, Tennessee, and Mississippi, will have presented a wide spread scene of desolation, in which the bones of American citizens would be found mingled with the ruins of their habitations, and the devastations of the country.²

Additional brief sketches of the general were written by contemporaries between 1828 and 1845. Four of these, by Jerome Van Crownin-

¹Thomas Hart Benton, Thirty Years' View (2 vols.; New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1854-1856), I, 167-80.

²S. Putnam Waldo, Memoirs of Andrew Jackson (Hartford: Silas Andrus, 1819), p. 299.

shield Smith (1828),³ William Cobbett (1834),⁴ Seba Smith (1834),⁵ and an anonymous New Yorker (1845),⁶ have been examined, but not one of these writers even mentioned the Seminole controversy. While this might seem strange in light of the political struggles of that period, one must remember that these works were not complete biographies.

After the death of the general in 1845, B. M. Dusenberry edited some eulogies of the former President with his own comments added. The editor mentioned the Seminole affair briefly, but did not express an opinion.⁷

A year later, John Frost, in a pictorial study of "Old Hickory," defended Jackson on the basis of the comprehensive nature of his orders from Calhoun. Referring to the encampment at Fort Scott, Frost wrote: "Here he received a letter from the secretary of war, dated February 6th, informing him of the entire approbation of the president of all the measures he had adopted to terminate the war. . . ." The author believed that Jackson had considered this to be an approval of his clandestine proposal of January 6, 1818.⁸

³Jerome Van Crowninshield Smith, Memoirs of Andrew Jackson (Boston: Charles Ewer, 1828).

⁴William Cobbett, Life of Andrew Jackson (New York: Harper & Bros., 1834).

⁵Seba Smith, The Life of Andrew Jackson (Philadelphia: T. K. Greenbank, 1834).

⁶A Citizen of Western New York, Memoirs of General Andrew Jackson (Auburn: James C. Derby and Co., 1845).

⁷B. M. Dusenberry (ed.), Monument to the Memory of General Andrew Jackson (Nashua: Charles T. McGill, 1846), p. 75.

⁸John Frost, Pictorial Life of Andrew Jackson (Hartford: Belknap and Hamersley, 1847), p. 440.

It was in 1850 that the next biography of the general appeared. John S. Jenkins, in a brief volume, defended Jackson's action on the ground of self-defense. He stated that there was certainly a necessity for crossing the line, and that the weakness of the Spanish authorities in failing to restrain the renegade Indians and Negroes justified the bold movements of the Tennessean.⁹ After saying that the January 6, 1818, missive had been written at the Hermitage, this writer made no further mention of the "Rhea letter," however.

As mentioned earlier, Jackson's own story of the affairs of 1818 and 1831 was not fully known until 1854.¹⁰ At that time Thomas Hart Benton published his massive two-volume Thirty Years' View in the United States Senate. Benton, a long-time Senator from Missouri had been a friend, then an enemy, and finally a staunch supporter of the general. In revealing the Jacksonian side of the story, Benton attempted to clarify the true place of the general in the history of the era. He believed that Jackson had suffered from the flurry of Calhoun eulogies that had appeared following the death of the Carolinian in 1850. Therefore, Benton desired to publish Jackson's own words in order to protect the reputation of the ex-President. In his defense of Jackson, Benton stressed two major areas. To begin with, he emphasized Jackson's statement that the comprehensiveness of the War Department orders fully justified the invasion. In addition, Benton brought out Jackson's view that Calhoun had played a perfidious role during the entire proceedings. This

⁹John S. Jenkins, Life and Public Services of Andrew Jackson (Buffalo: G. H. Derby and Co., 1850), p. 165.

¹⁰Benton, Thirty Years' View, I, 167-80.

writer did not stress the defense of Jackson on the basis of international law because he felt that that aspect was outside the scope of his Thirty Years' View (1820-1850). Although the Missourian did not give much attention to his own opinions on the subject, he did not believe, however, that Monroe had given Rhea the authorization that Jackson desired. On the other hand, the huge Westerner thought that the chieftain had been justified in his acts by the necessities of the border situation.¹¹

Thus it is seen that of the biographers who paved the way for Parton's monumental work which was published in 1859-60, four--Waldo, Frost, Jenkins, and Benton--defended the hero, while the rest made no comment. It is significant to note that none condemned the general, and also that none even referred to the "Rhea letter" dispute of 1831.

James Parton, an English-born newspaperman who took up historical writing as the sole means of earning his living, spent twelve months collecting material for his life of Jackson. His three-volume work was considered the best portrayal of "Old Hickory" until Professor Bassett's more scholarly biography was published in 1916.

While Parton was convinced that the elevation of Jackson to the presidency had been a mistake on the part of the American people, he nevertheless tended to justify the general for his actions in Spanish Florida. The author believed that the hero of New Orleans was a fighting man and little more than that. His political controversies were mainly personalized. For example, he hated the Whigs much, but Henry Clay more; nullification much, but Calhoun more; the Bank much, but Biddle more.¹²

¹¹Ibid., I, 180.

¹²James A. Parton, A Life of Andrew Jackson (3 vols.; New York: Mason Bros., 1859-1860), III, 694-95.

In his treatment of the Florida affair, Parton did not use the same bases of justification which had been advocated by the early writers. Instead he defended Jackson principally because of the failure of the government to act after the receipt of his letter of January 6, 1818. To the author it was inexplicable that the general's proposal could have been treated so lightly by men who were apparently anxious to acquire Spanish Florida. He emphasized this point as follows:

Would any one believe that an affair of such vast importance, which came within a lifting of the finger (so said the prime minister of England) of involving two nations in war, could be treated so lightly? Was Andrew Jackson an edged tool that could be safely played with? He was in earnest when he wrote that letter to the President. He meant every word of it. He looked upon himself, and rightly, as the custodian of the southern frontiers, whose tranquility, he well knew, no vigilance could secure as long as a Spanish government ruled, and British adventurers conspired, in Florida.¹³

Parton was also amazed that John Quincy Adams, whose prime responsibility was foreign affairs, was not even aware of the existence of the letter of January 6 until the case was reopened by Crawford several years later.¹⁴

On the other hand, the biographer was not ready to admit that Monroe had directly authorized the seizure of the posts through the medium of the famous "Rhea letter." Parton agreed that there was no allusion to the general's letter in any of the correspondence of the President, but he was not willing to state whether this was due to forgetfulness on the part of Monroe or to his desire to keep the incident secret.¹⁵ This writer asserted that the absence of any reference to the

¹³Ibid., II, 436.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

"Rhea letter" in the Monroe-Jackson epistles was indeed remarkable. In addition, the hostile correspondence between Calhoun and the general was also devoid of any such reference.¹⁶

As previously mentioned, Monroe failed to recall that he had conferred any authorization through Rhea, while Jackson insisted that the letter had been burned upon the Rhea-carried request of the Virginian. Parton believed that Monroe did not knowingly give Rhea the mission of granting approval to Jackson's proposal of January 6, but he thought that the President might have spoken to the congressman of Jackson's letter in an offhand manner which Rhea could have misconstrued. The biographer asserted that if Monroe had done so he certainly must have forgotten about it. Moreover, the biographer stated that there have been some remarkable lapses of memory in history. He cited Walter Scott's situation when he dictated The Bride of Lammermoor while he was suffering torture from an acute disease. Later, when the printed novel was placed in his hands, he declared that he couldn't remember any thing except the basic outline of the story.¹⁷ Therefore, Parton suggested a possible answer for the question of veracity involved. Perhaps there had been a "Rhea letter" which Monroe unknowingly had authorized.

The next biography of the general did not appear until 1882 when William G. Sumner wrote his Andrew Jackson for The American Statesman Series. While Sumner tended to be anti-Jackson, he nevertheless made this statement about the invasion:

He (Jackson) certainly supposed that he had the secret

¹⁶Ibid., II, 528.

¹⁷Ibid., II, 528-29.

concurrence of the administration in conquering Florida. In 1811, orders were given to Gen. [sic] Matthews to sound the inhabitants of East Florida as to coming into the Union; also not to let any foreign nation occupy Florida. Anyone who knew this might well infer that the authorities at Washington would not be scrupulous about invading Florida.¹⁸

On the other hand, Sumner emphasized the fact that Jackson did not mention the "Rhea letter" in his 1818 correspondence with Monroe.¹⁹

In a biography of the general published in 1900, William G. Brown merely made reference to the opinion that Jackson had understood that his suggestion had been approved, and had acted according. This writer did not mention other points of justification nor did he go into any detail on this matter.²⁰

Several years hence, Augustus C. Buell suggested that Monroe's veracity was in doubt. The following quotation testifies to this belief:

Mr. Monroe was too ill to transact executive business when he received this letter, but he read it. Then he handed it to Mr. Calhoun who returned it with the remark that no one but the President could answer it--or words to that effect. Shortly afterwards the President sent for Mr. John Rhea, laid Jackson's letter before him and requested him to write a reply. Mr. Rhea did so, and in his reply stated to General Jackson that the President approved the suggestion.²¹

So for the first time a writer stated positively that Monroe had erred in his recollection of the details of the clandestine arrangements. It must be noted, however, that the Buell volumes contained neither foot-

¹⁸William G. Sumner, Andrew Jackson, From The American Statesman Series, ed. J. T. Morse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1882), p. 56.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 65.

²⁰William G. Brown, Andrew Jackson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1900), p. 90.

²¹Augustus C. Buell, History of Andrew Jackson (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), II, 115.

notes nor a bibliography, so there was no indication as to the source of his alleged facts.

Shortly afterwards, Cyrus T. Brady penned the following concerning the legality and justification of the invasion:

Jackson had no legal right, of course, to invade Florida again, although the Seminoles at the instigation of British agents were using Florida as a base from which to war upon the border settlements of the U. S. The feebled [sic] Spanish government protested vainly against this breach of neutrality, but a country which cannot keep order within its own borders, and which permits its citizens, or denizens, to make war on their own account upon a friendly nation has no reasonable ground for complaint if such disorder is kept down by force, even though its own territory be invaded for the purpose.²²

Thus, Jackson's movements were defended because of the inability of the Spanish officials to govern their territory effectively.

Concerning the subsequent use of the "Rhea letter" during the political controversy of 1830, Brady introduced a new facet. He insisted that neither Jackson nor Monroe would have lied, but he hinted that Rhea might have invented the story. Jackson claimed to have seen the letter, however, thereby exonerating his fellow-Tennessean from this charge. The writer added that "nobody can explain this matter satisfactorily now."²³

The Jacksonian biographers, therefore, were quite generous to "Old Hickory" in their treatments of the Florida proceedings. Those who wrote about the other men of the era were not as ready to defend the general, however. In fact, several were rather emphatic in their denunciation of his actions.

In 1830 George D. Prentice, a Whig newspaperman from New England,

²²Cyrus T. Brady, The True Andrew Jackson (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1906), p. 111.

²³Ibid., p. 190.

was sent to Kentucky to compile material for a biography of Henry Clay.²⁴ In his volume, which was designed to help Henry Clay defeat Jackson in the 1832 election, Prentice levelled a bitter attack on the general for his movements in Florida.²⁵ Prentice referred to the various high-handed and lawless measures of Jackson which were well calculated to alarm the friends of the Constitution.²⁶ The author further defamed the hero of New Orleans with this critical commentary on the Florida events:

As an excuse for taking St. Marks, the general had informed the war department, in a letter dated a day or two prior to the event, that he thought the place a convenient depot for his military operations, and was moreover afraid, that, unless he took it, it would fall into the hands of the Indians. The former reason is too absurd for notice, and the latter is but little better. He could not be afraid, that the Indians would possess themselves of St. Marks. At his bare approach, the frightened fugitives fled in all directions, without lifting a hand against him; and, when he had arrived in the vicinity of the fortress, there was scarce an Indian in all that section of the country.²⁷

Consequently, this writer believed that when Jackson seized the Spanish posts in Florida, he had acted for personal political gain.²⁸

Calvin Colton, in his two-volume The Life and Times of Henry Clay, which was published in 1846, did not devote much space to the incident.

²⁴Dumas Malone (ed.), Dictionary of American Biography (20 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928-1944), XV, 186. The work, which was published the following year, made such a favorable impression upon Kentucky politicians that Prentice was invited to edit an anti-Jacksonian newspaper in Louisville. Ibid.

²⁵George D. Prentice, Henry Clay (Hartford: Samuel Hanmer, Jr. and John Jay Phelps, 1831), p. 162.

²⁶Ibid., p. 164.

²⁷Ibid., p. 173.

²⁸Ibid., p. 174.

He did say that the administration had been very reluctant to sustain Jackson, but had done so as the lesser of two evils.²⁹ In other words, it would have been worse to censure Jackson, thereby giving satisfaction to Spain. Neither Colton nor Prentice made any reference to the alleged authorization carried by John Rhea.

During the same year, William L. MacKenzie published a biography of Martin Van Buren. While giving no attention to the points of justification mentioned in 1818 and 1819, this writer did have a definite opinion on the existence of the "Rhea letter." MacKenzie felt that the original "Rhea letter" had been manufactured by Jackson to help Van Buren in his struggle with Calhoun. Therefore, Jackson's movements in 1818 could not have been defended on the basis of the "Rhea letter."³⁰

Several additional biographies of Jackson's contemporaries were published during the decade preceding the Civil War. In his John C. Calhoun, John S. Jenkins merely mentioned the Seminole affair without expressing an opinion on the justification of the general.³¹ Two years later (1852) the famed journalist, Horace Greeley, edited the biography of Clay which had been originally written by Epes Sargent ten years before. The death of Clay in 1852 prompted Greeley to complete the work for Sargent, who was incapacitated at the time.³² In his volume, Sargent

²⁹Calvin Colton, The Life and Times of Henry Clay (2 vols.; New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1846), I, 253.

³⁰William MacKenzie, The Life and Times of Martin Van Buren (Boston: Cooke and Co., 1846), p. 106.

³¹John S. Jenkins, John C. Calhoun (Auburn: John E. Beardsley, 1850), p. 194.

³²Malone (ed.), Dictionary of American Biography, XVI, 356. Sargent had become interested in writing a biography of the Kentuckian while he was serving as Washington correspondent for the Boston Daily Atlas. Ibid.

attacked the Tennessean when he referred to the "discreditable history of the wrongs and usurpation perpetrated by General Jackson."³³ In analyzing Clay's attack on "Old Hickory" in the House of 1819, the author stated:

Even at that distant day, Mr. Clay saw in the conduct of General Jackson, the indications of that imperious will--of that spirit of insubordination--which, dangerous as they were in a military commander, were not less pernicious and alarming in a civil chief magistrate. With his keen instinctive faculty of penetration, he discovered the despotic and impulsive nature of the man.³⁴

Two separate works on John Quincy Adams, published in 1856 and 1858 respectively, offered little on the subject. The first, by William H. Seward, merely referred to Adams' defense of the general without giving the author's personal opinion. Seward gave no account whatsoever of the disputed "Rhea letter" or the controversy of 1830-1831.³⁵ The second, by Josiah Quincy, was equally evasive on the topic. Quincy reviewed Adams' reasons for vindicating the general, but offered no views of his own.³⁶

The next three decades experienced a virtual drouth in biographies of these principal characters. The first work of note was John P. Kennedy's Life of William Wirt, published in 1872, which made no mention at all of the Seminole affair.³⁷ While Wirt had been a member of Monroe's cabinet

³³Epes Sargent and Horace Greeley, The Life and Public Services of Henry Clay (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1852), p. 82.

³⁴Ibid., p. 83.

³⁵William H. Seward, Life and Services of John Quincy Adams (New York: Miller, Orton, and Mulligan, 1856), pp. 119-20.

³⁶Josiah Quincy, Memoir of the Life of John Quincy Adams (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Co., 1858), pp. 85-88.

³⁷John P. Kennedy, Memoirs of the Life of William Wirt (2 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1872).

at the time of the Florida proceedings, one must remember that he had remained virtually silent throughout the meetings.

In 1887 Carl Schurz wrote a biography of Clay in which he mentioned factors which both favored and opposed Jackson, but he did not take a definite stand on either side. Schurz did not feel that the War Department orders had been broad enough to warrant the general's actions. On the other hand, he did think the chieftain's movements had been justified by the presence of hostile Indians in the area.³⁸ Actually, the author was mainly concerned with developing the story of the Clay-Jackson feud, and did not give much attention to the Florida affair itself.

John T. Morse, the editor of The American Statesman Series, wrote his own biography of Adams in 1895. His views on the subject were brief but definite, as is shown by the following indictment of the general:

Such doubts (boundaries) had proved a ready source of quarrel, which could hardly be assuaged by General Jackson marching about in unquestionable Spanish territory, seizing towns and hanging people after his lawless, ignorant, energetic fashion.³⁹

Needless to say, Morse did not justify Jackson's actions, nor did he make any mention of the role of the "Rhea letter" in the matter.

The year 1899 witnessed the publication of three short biographies for The American Statesman Series--John C. Calhoun by Herman von Holst; James Monroe by D. C. Gilman; and Martin Van Buren by Edwin M. Shepard. Von Holst believed that the general had acted in good faith in his Florida

³⁸Carl Schurz, Life of Henry Clay, From The American Statesman Series, ed. J. T. Morse (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1887), I, 151-57.

³⁹John T. Morse, John Quincy Adams, From The American Statesman Series, ed. J. T. Morse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1895), p. 111.

expedition. He indicated that since Jackson's letter of January 6 had accidentally remained unanswered, the old hero had interpreted the silence as tacit consent. Later, without regard to dates, the Tennessean had misconstrued a letter from the Secretary of War on another matter (channeling of all Southern Division correspondence through the commanding general) as proof that the government had given him full discretion.⁴⁰ Von Holst did not allude to the "Rhea letter," but he thought that Jackson had been justified by the silence of the administration.⁴¹ Gilman, writing about Monroe, believed that Jackson had directly violated his orders. This writer also stated that the "Rhea letter," which Jackson claimed and Monroe disclaimed, was never produced nor authenticated.⁴² Shepard was mainly concerned with protecting Van Buren from implication in the "Rhea letter" controversy of 1831. He did not indicate whether or not he believed that Jackson was justified in his actions. Also, the author failed to express a view concerning the existence of the alleged missive.⁴³

The last major pre-World War I biography examined was J. E. D. Shipp's work on William H. Crawford, published in 1909. Shipp referred to the enmity between his subject and the general, and bitterly condemned

⁴⁰Herman von Holst, John C. Calhoun, From The American Statesman Series, ed. J. T. Morse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1899), p. 89.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Daniel C. Gilman, James Monroe, From The American Statesman Series, ed. J. T. Morse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1899), p. 145.

⁴³Edward M. Shepard, Martin Van Buren, From The American Statesman Series, ed. J. T. Morse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1899), p. 187.

Jackson for the 1818 invasion. Shipp has written:

On the pretext that the Spanish authorities were inciting the Indians to commit outrages in Georgia and under the plea of military necessity, Jackson invaded the Spanish territory of Florida, seizing St. Marks and Pensacola.⁴⁴

The words "pretext" and "plea of military necessity" indicate that Shipp did not approve of the chieftain's actions.

Most of the principal historians writing in the era covered in this chapter did not delve deeply into the problem. The first multi-volume history to give any attention whatsoever to the dispute was published by Richard Hildreth in 1849-1853. Yet Hildreth was very brief in his treatment of the matter. The author recognized that the seizure of St. Marks and Pensacola had been without specific orders. On the other hand, "considering the aid and encouragement offered by these posts to the hostile Indians," Hildreth considered Jackson's act "abundantly justifiable on the principle of self-defense."⁴⁵ He expressed no opinion at all concerning the existence of the "Rhea letter."

Years later, James Schouler began his rather extensive study of the Seminole proceedings and, specifically, the "Rhea letter" itself. He published important articles in periodicals in 1884 and 1905. In addition, his lengthy history of the United States covered the Florida affair thoroughly. The first volume of this work was released in 1894.

In his history Schouler indicated that while the Seminole affair was not an important military operation, Jackson's role in the proceedings

⁴⁴J. E. D. Shipp, The Giant Days: The Life and Times of William H. Crawford (Americus, Georgia: Southern Printers, 1909), p. 151.

⁴⁵Richard Hildreth, The History of the United States of America (6 vols.; New York: Harper and Bros., 1849-1853), III, 646.

was later of major significance from a political standpoint. Early in his narrative of the Florida invasion, the historian wrote:

The Seminole war, with its singular political consequences, absorbed a large share of the public attention during the second session of this Congress. So far as that war related to the immediate belligerents and their hostile encounters, it hardly deserved so imposing a title; but the disputes, domestic and international, which Jackson's method of conducting it engendered, gives to that contest a memorable importance in our history.⁴⁶

In relating the story of the Seminole war, Schouler was willing to condemn the general for the proposal he had made in his letter of January 6, 1818, to the President. The historian apparently believed that Jackson had desired personal political gain from such an invasion. The following statement emphasized his opinion:

This singular epistle, which indicated on the general's part a personal wish to carry the war into Spain precisely as he afterwards did, heedless of the lawlessness of such a course and the perfidy to which it must have exposed our responsible Executive in the eyes of mankind, was written from Nashville before Jackson had received his marching orders.⁴⁷

Furthermore, Schouler questioned the authenticity of the statements by which the general sought to justify his action in capturing Pensacola. According to the historian, Jackson's own testimony has shown that he marched to Pensacola only after the receipt of word that the Indians were assembling a force which was being assisted by active Spanish aid. Even then, Jackson had insisted that his decision to seize the garrison had been made after the Spanish commandant had threatened to use force if the American troops did not vacate the area immediately.⁴⁸

⁴⁶James B. Schouler, A History of the United States of America (7 vols.; New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1894-1913), III, 57.

⁴⁷Ibid., III, 69.

⁴⁸Ibid., III, 74-75.

But, said Schouler, Jackson's posthumous statement, published by Benton, made the important admission that the general had seized Pensacola and virtually annexed Florida to the United States in accordance with the plan proposed by him in his letter to Monroe on January 6, 1818. Therefore, the historian believed that the events which occurred in and near Pensacola were only incidental in view of Jackson's well-laid plans to seize East Florida.⁴⁹

Schouler also went on to question the theory that Jackson was justified because of the danger that the redmen might again attack the settlers in Georgia and Alabama. Nor was the historian willing to admit that the duplicity of the Spanish officials provided sufficient grounds for the general's deeds. Schouler agreed that the governor at St. Marks might have been an accomplice of the Seminoles, but he did not believe that the other Spanish commandants were clearly implicated. Even if all the officials had been guilty, added the writer, it would not have been necessary to seize the posts on the principle of self-preservation. In addition, Schouler said that Jackson should not have presumed that the Spanish government sanctioned the treachery of her provincial agents.⁵⁰

Concerning the famed "Rhea letter," Schouler denied that Monroe had ever authorized the writing of such a note. He averred that there was no allusion in all of Jackson's correspondence with the President to a private understanding inconsistent with the orders of the War Department. Indeed, the justification relied upon in those letters was based upon the

⁴⁹Ibid., III, 75.

⁵⁰Ibid., III, 77.

premise that Jackson had misinterpreted the intent of those directives.⁵¹ Furthermore, Monroe on December 21, 1818, had explained his not having read the January 6 letter, and Jackson apparently had been satisfied with the President's account of the incident.⁵²

Consequently, Schouler laid most of the blame for the controversy over the alleged authorization directly on the doorstep of the general. At the same time, he recognized the weakness of Rhea, who had been so willing to help his old friend. The historian referred to Rhea as "a man never of much reputation, who is remembered in history only as one of Jackson's constant parasites."⁵³ Schouler also believed that the political circumstances in 1818-1819 made it inherently impossible that Monroe should have issued the secret order through Rhea.⁵⁴

Furthermore, in response to the theory that Rhea might have attempted to deceive Jackson by writing the letter in 1818 without Monroe's consent, Schouler said that Rhea had neither the nerve nor the cunning to play such a role.⁵⁵ This writer also wondered at the allegation that the general had burned the secret letter in April, 1819, upon the request of Rhea. He stated:

Why should one of the General's astuteness have acted thus on Rhea's oral request unsupported by proof that the request came from the President and without a suspicion of Rhea's motives in

⁵¹Ibid., III, 82-83.

⁵²Schouler, "Monroe and the Rhea Letter," Magazine of American History, XII (October, 1884), 315.

⁵³Ibid., p. 311.

⁵⁴Schouler, "Jackson and Van Buren Papers," Atlantic Monthly, XCV (February, 1905), 219.

⁵⁵Ibid.

making it?⁵⁶

Finally, Schouler attacked the circumstances surrounding Rhea's letter to Monroe in June, 1831, in the following manner:

John Rhea, now superannuated, wrote to trap ex-President Monroe into a correspondence which would import that by some means the latter had connived at a treacherous seizure of the Floridas, and had sent through Rhea himself the hint that Jackson desired. This idea was utterly preposterous, and the whole correspondence of 1818 belied it.⁵⁷

According to Schouler, perhaps Jackson and Rhea thought Monroe was too near death in 1831 to defend himself.⁵⁸

It was inexplicable to this writer that neither Rhea nor Jackson pretended to state the substance of the burned letter, the dates of Rhea's interview with Monroe, the terms of the supposed authority, or any other details. According to Schouler, only one of two theories appeared tenable. First, that Rhea transmitted to the general in Florida a pretended authority which the President had never given him. This might well explain the anxiety of the Congressman in 1819 that his letter to the chieftain should be destroyed. Second, that the whole story was fabricated in 1831 by Rhea and others in the confidence of Jackson in order to complete the political discrediting of Calhoun. Schouler accepted the second theory.⁵⁹

Thus, James Schouler condemned the 1818 deeds of Jackson. He rejected the grounds of self-defense, misconduct of Spanish officials, and the comprehensive nature of the War Department orders as suitable explanations for the general's actions. Also, Schouler refused to accept

⁵⁶Schouler, Magazine of American History, p. 321.

⁵⁷Schouler, History, IV, 37-38.

⁵⁸Schouler, Atlantic Monthly, p. 220.

⁵⁹Schouler, Magazine of American History, p. 322.

the existence of the "Rhea letter." The historian was unable, however, to explain satisfactorily Monroe's failure to act upon the chieftain's letter of January 6, 1818.

Other historians of the pre-World War I era did not emphasize the Florida affair. In 1895, Benson J. Lossing, an admirer of Jackson, justified the general on the principle that the public safety could not have been secured in any other way. This writer did not mention the "Rhea letter," however.⁶⁰ Similarly, Woodrow Wilson believed that Jackson had been justified by the necessity of immediate action in a situation which had apparently developed since his orders were issued. Wilson, also, did not express an opinion concerning the existence of the alleged secret missive.⁶¹ In 1906, Kendric C. Babcock laid the blame for the entire affair on Monroe and Adams. He intimated that the secret of their whole game was to compel Spain to cede Florida, and to this end, the President and the Secretary contrived skillfully.⁶² Babcock felt that Jackson had been wronged in the cabinet and in the congressional proceedings, and needed to be elected President as a reward for having his integrity impeached because of acts committed in the name of the nation.⁶³ Moreover, H. Addington Bruce, in an essay published in 1908, implied that whether or not Jackson had been authorized by Monroe to attack the posts, his actions were justified by the necessity

⁶⁰Benson J. Lossing, History of the United States (8 vols.; New York: Lossing History Co., 1895), V, 1323.

⁶¹Woodrow Wilson, History of the United States (5 vols.; New York: Harper and Bros., 1902), III, 255-58.

⁶²Kendric C. Babcock, The Rise of American Nationality, Vol. XIII of The American Nation: A History, ed. A. B. Hart (28 vols.; New York: Harper and Bros., 1906), 280.

⁶³Ibid., p. 282.

of the situation. Bruce believed that Jackson's movements brought to a head the formulation of the Florida Treaty of 1819, and were therefore in accordance with our over-all policy of westward expansion which had begun with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.⁶⁴

The final history of this period was completed by J. B. McMaster in 1913. Although he apparently believed that Jackson was justified because he had misinterpreted his broad orders, McMaster did not state any further opinions on the problem. Concerning the "Rhea letter," this writer recognized that Jackson's claim and Monroe's denial were utterly irreconcilable. He did not express his own views on the dispute, however.⁶⁵

Thus, the views of the biographers and historians from 1819 to 1914 have been examined. The biographers of Jackson overwhelmingly defended their subject, although their bases for supporting him varied considerably. The necessity of protecting the frontier was given as the chief defense of Jackson by Waldo, Jenkins, and Benton. Frost and Brown emphasized the comprehensive nature of the War Department orders, while Parton and Sumner stressed the failure of the administration to answer Jackson's letter of January 6, 1818. In addition, the misconduct of the Spanish officials was cited by Brady and Waldo. None of Jackson's biographers condemned him, although several⁶⁶ either failed to mention

⁶⁴H. Addington Bruce, "Andrew Jackson and the Acquisition of Florida," Outlook, LXXXVIII (March 28, 1908), 730-42.

⁶⁵John Bach McMaster, History of the People of the United States (8 vols.; New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1884-1913), IV, 437-56.

⁶⁶Jerome Smith, Cobbett, Seba Smith, A Citizen of Western New York, and Dusenberry.

the matter or had no opinion.

The biographers of Jackson's contemporaries, however, have taken an entirely different view of the problem. Only two, Schurz and von Holst, defended the general for his actions in Florida. The former based his opinion on the necessity of defending the frontier, while von Holst believed that the silence of the government was interpreted by Jackson as a tacit approval of his proposal of January 6. On the other hand, Prentice, Sargent, Morse, and Shipp asserted that the Tennessean had acted for personal political gain without being authorized by Monroe. The general's violation of the Constitution was cited by Gilman and Prentice, while Colton stated that Jackson was sustained by the government only because popular opinion would not have allowed giving in to the Spanish demands for censure. Several⁶⁷ biographers did not refer to the Seminole controversy.

The major historians of the period tended to justify the chieftain, however. The most widely used reason, the necessity of defending the frontier, was emphasized by Hildreth, Lossing, Wilson, and Bruce. Babcock believed that Monroe and Adams had planned the entire affair as an instrument of pressure against Spain, and that Jackson was their innocent tool. McMaster referred to the general's misinterpretation of his orders as the basis for his defense of Jackson. On the other hand, the only condemnation of the general came from Schouler. This historian believed that the hero of New Orleans had violated his orders willfully. In addition, he insisted that there was no foundation for defending Jackson on the grounds of the misconduct of the Spanish officials or of the necessity

⁶⁷MacKenzie, Jenkins, Seward, Quincy, Shepard, and Kennedy.

of protecting the frontier.

The writers of the era also have given considerable attention to the existence of the "Rhea letter." Only one biographer of Jackson, Augustus Buell, believed that there actually was a "Rhea letter," as the general claimed. Several⁶⁸ indicated that there was no such missive, although Parton suggested that Rhea might have been referring to another subject when he wrote a letter on January 12, 1818. Most⁶⁹ of the early writers did not even mention the controversy. Brady added in 1906 that no one could satisfactorily explain the matter at that time.

None of the biographers of Jackson's contemporaries accepted the "Rhea letter" story. Only two, MacKenzie and Gilman, actually stated that the missive was a fabrication, however. The others⁷⁰ did not give their views on the existence of the letter.

Of the historians, only Schouler expressed a view on the alleged authorization. He indicated his belief that Monroe had never given the desired hint to Rhea; moreover, the whole story was an invention by the Jacksonians in order to crush Calhoun completely.

Thus, the path had been prepared for the work of John Spencer Bassett, and for the more recent views of other biographers and historians.

⁶⁸Benton, Parton, Sumner, and Brown.

⁶⁹Waldo, Jerome Smith, Cobbett, Seba Smith, A Citizen of Western New York, Dusenberry, Frost, and Jenkins.

⁷⁰Jenkins, Sargent, Quincy, Shepard, Prentice, Colton, Seward, Kennedy, Schurz, Morse, von Holst, and Shipp.

CHAPTER IV

VIEWPOINTS FROM 1914 TO THE PRESENT

The preceding chapters have considered the views on the Florida question of Jackson and his contemporaries, as well as of biographers and historians up to 1914. In this chapter, the writings of authors from the outbreak of World War I until the present will be examined. Again, the biographers of Jackson will be studied first, followed by the biographers of contemporaries and, then, the major historians of the period. The opinions of these writers on both the justification of the general and the existence of the "Rhea letter" will be presented.

During World War I, John Spencer Bassett completed his excellent portrayal of Jackson's life. Considerably shorter than Parton's work, Bassett's biography was much more scholarly. His study is still accepted as the most authoritative summary of the career of "Old Hickory."

Bassett's contributions to the Florida historiography were extensive. He has offered theories concerning the Florida invasion of 1818, some of which had not been tendered or investigated by the early writers. In addition, his writings have had considerable influence on the more recent studies of the entire Jacksonian era.

Bassett believed that Monroe was happy to have Jackson in a position to seize the Florida province if negotiations with Spain should falter. This writer, therefore, assumed that the President should have

backed his general to a greater degree in the subsequent hearings.¹

Bassett based most of his defense of the hero of New Orleans on the general's interpretation of Monroe's response, or lack of response, to the proposal penned from the Hermitage on January 6, 1818.² Yet Bassett did not approve of Jackson's proposal to seize the territory, because he felt that such a move was not sound from the standpoint of foreign policy.³ Also, this writer said that Jackson, when he left Tennessee early in 1818, did not actually intend to carry out his threat to seize all of Florida. After seizing St. Marks, the general was preparing to vacate the area when he received word on May 5, 1818, that hostile Indians were assembling at Pensacola. It was then, according to Bassett, that he decided to carry out his early proposal.⁴ As Bassett thought that Jackson had been justified in his actions because of the failure of the administration to answer the January 6 letter, he gave little attention to the other reasons submitted earlier.

Concerning the chieftain's statement that he had been given an authorization from Monroe through the medium of John Rhea, this historian expressed some definite views. According to Bassett, both men were of unquestionable honesty, yet the reader must choose between their widely differing statements. But, Monroe, as an educated man and a trained official, probably had a more reliable memory. Jackson's

¹John Spencer Bassett, The Life of Andrew Jackson .
(New York: The Macmillan Co., 1916), pp. 243-44.

²Ibid., p. 249.

³Ibid., p. 246.

⁴Ibid.

defense, which he prepared at the time but did not publish, showed that he was not scholarly minded. The writer added that there is more probability that his memory was inferior to that of Monroe.⁵ Moreover, according to Bassett, there were at least four facts that weakened Jackson's story. In the first place, the Tennessean never gave more than a very general account of the alleged letter from Rhea. Even if it were written, perhaps Jackson misunderstood its true meaning. Second, although he insisted that he had made a note concerning the elusive document opposite the copy of his January 6 epistle in his letterbook, no such letterbook has ever been found. Bassett believed that Jackson would have been more careful to preserve this bit of corroborating evidence after the loss of the main piece, if he had possessed it. Third, Bassett questioned the necessity of destroying the "Rhea letter" in order to keep it from harming our relations with Spain. His belief was based on the fact that the treaty acquiring Florida had already been signed in February, 1819, and it was expected that Spain would ratify it at once. Thus, nothing could have been gained by destroying the letter. Finally, Bassett asserted that Jackson's case was injured by the fact that Rhea could not recall the particulars of the incident, and had to receive some promptings from the general before he could speak out.⁶

While not accepting Jackson's story that a direct authorization from Monroe had been received, this biographer stated that Rhea had written a letter to the general on January 12, 1818. However, that note did not deal with Jackson's proposal; instead it concerned an entirely

⁵Ibid., p. 247.

⁶Ibid., pp. 247-48.

different matter. Jackson had been feuding with his superiors about their sending of orders directly to his subordinate officers without making the information known to the division commander. Bassett thus stated:

It is possible that some approving expression of Monroe in a later conversation with Rhea was reported by the latter to Jackson in such a way that the general would take it for the hint to invade Florida. Neither Monroe nor Rhea then knew about the suggestion of January 6, and an approving expression of the former may have been innocently reported by the latter in such a way as to convey a world of meaning to the expectant Jackson. We can hardly doubt that Jackson burned, as he alleged, a letter from Rhea containing some statement, which he took for permission; the statement so interpreted must, therefore, have referred to something else. This explanation seems more probable, since neither Jackson nor Overton gives any definite notion of now the permission in the burned letter was worded. The alternative to this theory, as far as I can see, is to hold that either Jackson or Monroe made false assertions, with the probability in favor of Jackson's guilt. It is difficult to believe this of either man.⁷

Thus, even though he did not accept the "Rhea letter" story as Jackson had claimed it, Bassett believed that he had acted with cause. Bassett's findings were to influence other biographers and historians in their later writings about Jackson.

Consequently, Frederic Austin Ogg used some of Bassett's interpretations when he wrote his Reign of Andrew Jackson in 1919 for The Chronicles of America Series. Ogg asserted that the general had felt that his powers as he interpreted them from the War Department orders were very broad. Jackson had not looked upon the invasion as a mere punitive expedition but as a means of acquiring permanent possession of a territory much desired by the United States. In addition, this author further defended the chieftain on the grounds that the silence of the administration following the receipt of his January 6 letter indicated

⁷Ibid., p. 249.

that his plans had the full, if secret, approval of the government.⁸ According to Ogg, one premise that was perfectly certain was that Jackson, when he carried his troops into Florida in 1818, had believed that the administration expected him to prepare the territory for permanent American occupation.⁹ This author, however, did not express any belief that there was an actual "Rhea letter" written to the general. His defense of the hero was solely that Jackson thought that the failure of the administration to reject his proposal meant that it was actually granting approval.

In 1922 Claude G. Bowers published a volume entitled The Party Battles of the Jackson Period. Bowers asserted that the alleged "Rhea letter" was introduced by the Jacksonians in an effort to punish Calhoun for having dared to oppose the hero in 1818-1819. This author named the Van Buren-Calhoun struggle for the succession to the Presidency as the chief reason for bringing the old controversy to light. Bowers said nothing more about the letter, nor did he give any opinion as to whether or not the general was justified in his actions.¹⁰

Five years later another biography of the Tennessean was published by Gerald W. Johnson. Johnson referred to the January 6 letter as "an outrageous proposal, a low, dishonest, cynical proposal, no doubt,

⁸Frederic A. Ogg, The Reign of Andrew Jackson: A Chronicle of the Frontier in Politics, Vol. XX of The Chronicles of America Series, ed. Allen Johnson (50 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919), 55-56.

⁹Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁰Claude G. Bowers, The Party Battles of the Jackson Period (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1922), pp. 88-115.

but highly practical statecraft, nevertheless."¹¹ Yet, this author was inclined to believe that Monroe, despite his pointblank denial of having responded to the suggestion, must have had some sort of a conversation with Rhea in which each completely misunderstood what the other was talking about. But Calhoun had seen Jackson's letter, and must have understood what was in the general's mind.¹² Therefore, stated this writer, Jackson understood that Rhea had given him the desired answer, as the government had slyly approved his proposal.¹³ Under such circumstances, Johnson believed that the general was justified in his actions.¹⁴

David Karsner's brief biography of Jackson and Mary A. Suber's unpublished master's thesis written in 1929 and 1930, respectively, gave scant attention to the controversy. Karsner indicated that the general was not justified on the point of self-defense, but did not have an opinion concerning the "Rhea letter."¹⁵ Suber said nothing at all about the Seminole proceedings.¹⁶

In the first volume of his biography of the chieftain, published in 1933, Marquis James defended him because of the administration's failure to act upon his January 6 proposal. James accepted Monroe's contention that the ex-President had not empowered Rhea to convey any assurance

¹¹Gerald W. Johnson, Andrew Jackson (New York: Minton, Balch, and Co., 1927), p. 196.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., pp. 198-99.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 196-99.

¹⁵David Karsner, Andrew Jackson (New York: Brentano's, 1929), pp. 260-61.

¹⁶Mary A. Suber, "Andrew Jackson, Pioneer" (Unpublished Masters thesis, University of Minnesota, 1930).

to Jackson. "On the other hand," stated the writer,--"and this is far more important--the evidence is clear that the administration understood General Jackson's intentions toward Florida, and, by the absence of any restraining sign or syllable, gave its consent to them."¹⁷ This author went on to show that the War Department was well aware of what was going on in Florida. James stated that "after he received word of the occupation of St. Marks, Secretary of War Calhoun wrote Governor Bibbs of Alabama: 'General Jackson is vested with full power to conduct the war as he may think best.'"¹⁸ James believed that Calhoun, and supposedly Monroe, knew full well what Jackson had planned for Florida, having read the Tennessean's clear letter of January 6, 1818.¹⁹

In his second volume, Portrait of a President, which appeared in 1937, James made little reference to the revival of the controversy in 1830-31. While attacking Calhoun for his duplicity in the affair, he did not change his views concerning Jackson's justification.²⁰

In 1939 Frances Norene Ahl attacked Jackson in the following manner:

I ask with whom was General Jackson waging war? Not with the Indian tribes because these tribes he had subdued and conquered. His use of the military forces of the United States must be viewed as an act of war against Spain, and in that light, must be considered as an usurpation of the powers of Congress and a direct violation of the laws and Constitution of the United States.²¹

¹⁷Marquis James, Andrew Jackson, The Border Captain (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1933), p. 308.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 308-09.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 309.

²⁰James, Portrait of a President, p. 239.

²¹Frances N. Ahl, Andrew Jackson and the Constitution (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1939), p. 47.

She did not, however, make any reference to the "Rhea letter."

Harold C. Syrett, in a recent work, offered the belief that the chieftain had been justified on the doctrine of self-defense. This author, however, gave no opinion concerning the controversial "Rhea letter."²²

In 1955, in a volume expanded from his doctoral dissertation, John W. Ward emphasized a point barely mentioned by several earlier writers. This involved the role played by Jackson's popularity among the masses of the people. This writer expressed himself as follows:

The Seminole affair had many facets. It involved domestic politics as well as foreign relations, the philosophy of American expansionism as well as international law. But an aspect not generally noted was the way in which the Seminole affair disclosed the sharply activist temper of the American people. The people approved Jackson's actions in Florida and resisted any efforts to translate his deeds into abstractions which had a relevance beyond the immediate situation. The opposition to Jackson in Congress attempted to censure Jackson on the high grounds of international law and to impugn his character by suggesting that his disregard for authority outside himself presented a grave threat to the democratic process. But . . . the people cared little for the letter of the law; they admired the man of action, the man of self-reliance.²³

Ward went on to assert that the general had been opposed mainly by men who were more concerned about Jackson's political possibilities than the legal aspects of the proceedings.²⁴ Thus, Ward apparently believed that the cabinet and the congressional attacks upon the general were not generated by their disapproval of the Florida acts as much as by their

²²Harold C. Syrett, Andrew Jackson (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953), p. 70.

²³John W. Ward, Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 58.

²⁴Ibid., p. 60.

fear of the rising popularity of Jackson. Ward did not express any views about the existence of the "Rhea letter."

Again, the Jacksonian writers tended to be generous to the hero in their treatments of the Seminole proceedings. "Old Hickory" did not fare as well in the eyes of the biographers of his contemporaries, however. It will also be seen that a number of these writers gave little or no attention to the problem, indicating that it was not as important to them as it was to the Jacksonians.

William M. Meigs' study of Calhoun was published in 1917. Meigs did not express an opinion on the problem as his discussion of the Florida affair mainly involved a defense of Calhoun's role in the proceedings.²⁵

Claude M. Fuess, a biographer of Daniel Webster, did not even allude to the Seminole controversy in his work published in 1930. This seems strange, as Webster was directly involved in the nullification dispute which helped complete the rift between Jackson and Calhoun.²⁶

In his The Adams Family, completed in 1931, James Truslow Adams simply condemned the general for later turning against John Quincy Adams who had been his only defender during the cabinet meetings of July, 1818.²⁷ This writer gave no other opinion about the controversy.

In the following year Bennett C. Clark, in a biography of Adams, expressed the following view concerning the "Rhea letter:"

²⁵William M. Meigs, The Life of John C. Calhoun (2 vols.; New York: The Neale Publishing Co., 1917), II, 386.

²⁶Claude M. Fuess, Daniel Webster (2 vols.; Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1930), I.

²⁷James Truslow Adams, The Adams Family (New York: The Literary Guild, 1930), p. 172.

The truth of this singular episode has never fully appeared. Monroe and Jackson were both men of unquestioned veracity, yet the President denied and Jackson strongly asserted, to a large degree supported by Rhea, that he had received the hint which he had requested. A possible explanation is that the message Monroe intended to convey was one of sympathy with Jackson in one of his numerous controversies, probably one he had then raging with his superior officer, General Jacob Brown. Be that as it may, Jackson unquestionably considered that he had the approval of the President and proceeded accordingly.²⁸

Hence, Clark defended the general on the basis of the failure of the administration to send a reply to his proposal of January 6, 1818. He also believed, as did Bassett, that a letter was written by Rhea to Jackson, but not one which carried Monroe's authorization to seize Florida.²⁹

The next major work considered was Glyndon G. Van Deusen's biography of Henry Clay, which was completed in 1937. This writer merely repeated Bassett's theory that the general's memory must have played him false in regard to the alleged authorization from Monroe.³⁰ Van Deusen did not further discuss the justification of the Tennessean.

In 1944, Charles M. Wiltse completed the first part of his three-volume biography of Calhoun. In this work, the writer "debunked" Bassett's theory that a letter from Rhea to Jackson concerning an entirely different matter could have been construed by the chieftain as the desired authorization. Wiltse stated that Rhea's letter was written on January 12, 1818; therefore, Jackson should have realized that his own

²⁸Bennett C. Clark, John Quincy Adams: Old Man Eloquent (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1932), p. 144.

²⁹Ibid., p. 145.

³⁰Glyndon G. Van Deusen, The Life of Henry Clay (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1937), p. 124.

letter of January 6 could not have possibly been answered by that date.³¹ This writer also placed the blame for the controversy of 1830-1831 squarely upon the shoulders of Jackson. Wiltse believed that the Tennessean's emphasis on the alleged "Rhea letter" was only a device to drive Calhoun from the party. According to this biographer, Jackson's reasons for purging Calhoun were twofold. First, the President felt that he had been wronged by Calhoun during the 1818 cabinet meetings; and second, Jackson blamed the South Carolinian for the Eaton affair.³²

The years of 1945 and 1946 saw the publication of two works on the life of James Monroe. The first, by Arthur Styron, brushed lightly over the Seminole controversy. He did, however, back Monroe in the Virginian's contention that the "Rhea letter" had never been written. The author added that neither the letter, nor any trace of it, has ever been found.³³

On the other hand, William P. Cresson delved more deeply into the problem. Cresson completely exonerated Monroe from any blame in the matter. He asserted that it was natural that the President, being ill, should have turned Jackson's letter of January 6 over to Calhoun and Crawford. This was because the Virginian saw that the letter dealt with Florida, and he assumed that there was nothing concerning that campaign that needed his personal attention. Therefore, reasoned Cresson, Monroe

³¹Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun (3 vols.; Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1944-1951), I, 156.

³²Ibid., II, 67.

³³Arthur Styron, The Last of the Cocked Hats: James Monroe and the Virginia Dynasty (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1945), p. 352.

thought that Calhoun should handle what appeared to the President to be a routine letter.³⁴ Thus, this writer tended to place the blame for the ensuing controversy on Calhoun and Crawford who had read the letter and should have understood Jackson's proposal.³⁵ Cresson also felt strongly that if Monroe had read the letter and had commissioned Rhea to answer it there would have been some allusion to it in the lengthy Jackson-Monroe correspondence carried on from July to December, 1818.³⁶ In reference to Monroe's later statement, made in 1827, that Rhea had agreed that the matter had not been discussed by the two men, this biographer stated: "It is reasonably safe to assume, then, in the light of this evidence and of Monroe's personal integrity, that he never had any dealings with John Rhea."³⁷

Consequently, one must conclude that Cresson not only refused to acknowledge the existence of the "Rhea letter," but failed in any way to justify the general's rape of the Spanish posts. This was further evidenced by his statement that "the acquisition of the Floridas by diplomacy rather than conquest was absolutely necessary to preserve peace in that area and to stamp out the Indian depredations."³⁸

Samuel Flagg Bemis, in a work on Adams published in 1949, reviewed the New Englander's role in the Seminole affair. The author

³⁴William P. Cresson, James Monroe (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), pp. 304-06.

³⁵Ibid., p. 305.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid., p. 308.

indicated that Jackson undoubtedly acted in the belief that the administration's silence meant consent. On the other hand, Bemis did not place much stock in Bassett's theory concerning the January 12 letter from Rhea to Jackson.³⁹ Yet this writer believed that Adams' vindication of the general on the grounds of self-defense and the misconduct of the Spanish officials was certainly correct.⁴⁰

In a recently published volume, Bemis expressed the view that the controversy of 1830 was strictly political in nature. In referring to this dispute Bemis said that Adams

knew what was back of all this controversy. Crawford still nursed his old rancorous feud with Calhoun; the Georgian was glad to lend himself vindictively to the new and bitter conflict between Van Buren and Calhoun for the succession, in which the Red Fox of Kinderhook now had Jackson's active alliance.⁴¹

Thus, this writer further hints that there was no authorization from Monroe in 1818.

A year later G. A. Lipsky completed a volume on Adams in which he mentioned that the Puritan had supported the general in the proceedings. This writer did not express any views on the justification of the hero, however.⁴²

Margaret L. Coit's portrayal of Calhoun, released during the same year, did not devote much space to the controversy. She did state that

³⁹Samuel Flagg Bemis, John Quincy Adams and the Foundation of American Foreign Policy (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1949), p. 320.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 321.

⁴¹Bemis, John Quincy Adams and the Union (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1956), pp. 213-14.

⁴²George A. Lipsky, John Quincy Adams, His Theories and Ideas (New York: Crowell, 1950), pp. 475-80.

apparently Rhea saw Monroe, took some unguarded remark for the desired hint, and passed the approval to Jackson.⁴³ Thus, Coit rejected the opinion previously stated by Schouler⁴⁴ and Bassett⁴⁵ that Rhea knew nothing about the general's letter of January 6. This writer did not make any further reference to the subject.

Thus, the biographers of Jackson's contemporaries widely differed in their interpretations of the problem. In general, the Adams writers tended to support the Tennessean, while the Calhoun and Monroe biographers condemned his actions. Several others--Fuess, Meigs, Van Deusen, and Lipsky--failed to express viewpoints.

While the biographers of the post-World War I period have been quite active, few major historians have entered into the Seminole controversy. The principal treatments of the problem were by Richard R. Stenberg, who condemned the general's actions, and George Dangerfield, who blamed others as well as Jackson. The other historians, in the main, had little to say about the affair in their respective volumes.

In 1916, E. B. Andrews completed his multi-volume History of the United States. In the third volume of the series, the historian made a brief reference to the invasion of Spanish Florida in 1818. Andrews did not accept the doctrine that Jackson had received secret approval for his plans. On the other hand, he did not believe that the general had willfully disobeyed War Department orders. To illustrate his point, the

⁴³Margaret L. Coit, John C. Calhoun: American Portrait (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1950), p. 122.

⁴⁴Refer to Chapter III, p. 73.

⁴⁵Refer to Chapter IV, p. 82.

historian wrote:

To clear out the filibusterers, the chief source of the Indian's discontent ever since before the Creek War, the hero of New Orleans, mistakenly supposing himself to be fortified by his Government's concurrence, boldly took forcible possession of all East Florida.⁴⁶

Several years later (1922) Edward Channing expressed the opinion that Jackson's orders had not been perfectly clear; therefore, the general had been forced to act according to his own judgment as to what was necessary under the existing circumstances. The author indicated, however, that Monroe felt that Jackson must have acted on facts that were unknown to the administration.⁴⁷ Neither Channing nor Andrews gave any attention to the "Rhea letter" itself.

Ten years hence, Margeruite B. Hamer, writing in the official publication of the East Tennessee Historical Society, submitted two theories dealing with the "Rhea letter" controversy. First, she asserted that Rhea's failure to remember the letter of authorization to Jackson may have been due to his senility in 1831. Secondly, she averred that Rhea's alleged answer to Jackson apparently involved another question.⁴⁸ This latter view, of course, was also held by Bassett. Miss Hamer, however, did not indicate which of the two possibilities was more acceptable to her.

⁴⁶Elisha B. Andrews, History of the United States (6 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894-1917), III, 46-47.

⁴⁷Edward Channing, A History of the United States (6 vols., New York: The Macmillan Co., 1905-1925), V, 335.

⁴⁸Margeruite B. Hamer, "John Rhea of Tennessee," East Tennessee Historical Society Publications, No. 4 (January, 1932), 43.

Writing in the Journal of Southern History in 1936, Richard R. Stenberg levelled a bitter indictment at the general for his statement that Monroe had secretly authorized the seizure of Florida. According to this writer, "the General's private letter of January 6, 1818, read in the light of his subsequent actions, shows that he intended to force upon the administration the annexation of Florida; and he openly confessed later, in his 'Exposition against Calhoun' (1831), that he had intended to seize and occupy Florida when he entered it."⁴⁹ In addition, Stenberg asserted that Rhea's letter to Jackson on December 18, 1818, proved that the congressman had not been aware of transmitting an authorization to the general in January, 1818.⁵⁰ To this writer, Rhea's failure in 1831 to recall any of the particulars involved in the alleged letter further proved the duplicity of Jackson in the affair.⁵¹ Stenberg believed that Jackson's story had been accepted by some historians because of the traditional honesty attributed to him. According to this writer, the absence of any reference to the "Rhea letter" in the private Monroe-Jackson correspondence of 1818 proved, however, that the general's reputation for truthfulness was not justified.⁵² So Stenberg concluded, "whether framed to meet the political exigency of 1827 or that of 1830, or framed at some earlier time, Jackson's 'Rhea letter' story is a fabrication equally transparent."⁵³

⁴⁹Richard R. Stenberg, "Jackson's 'Rhea letter' Hoax," Journal of Southern History, II (November, 1936), 481.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 482.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 484.

⁵²Ibid., p. 487.

⁵³Ibid., p. 496.

In 1937, Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager published The Growth of the American Republic in two volumes. The authors wrote: "The Seminoles were beaten, but Jackson had not finished. Another forced march through the jungle and Pensacola was taken, the Spanish governor ejected, and the fortress garrisoned with Americans."⁵⁴ Later, these writers stated that "Adams had his way" regarding the support of the general.⁵⁵ Morison and Commager did not express any personal views concerning the justification of Jackson, however.

Charles and Mary Beard made the following statement in 1944: "Ordered by Monroe, after one of these attacks, to pursue a band of Indian raiders to their retreat, General Andrew Jackson marched after them into East Florida, where he did more than fight them. He took possession of the region."⁵⁶ Like Morison and Commager, the Beards did not state any opinions on the problem.

Asa E. Martin, in his two-volume History of the United States, published in 1946, asserted that the general was justified by the comprehensive nature of the War Department orders. This historian did not mention the "Rhea letter."⁵⁷

In 1952, George Dangerfield completed a study of the Monroe era. He asserted that the Virginian was truly careless in not reading Jackson's letter, as was Calhoun in not explaining it to him. Both men

⁵⁴Samuel E. Morison and Henry S. Commager, The Growth of the American Republic (2 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), I, 346.

⁵⁵Ibid., I, 347.

⁵⁶Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, A Basic History of the United States (New York: The New Home Library, 1944), p. 176.

⁵⁷Asa E. Martin, History of the United States (2 vols.; Ginn and Co., 1946), I, 466-67.

certainly knew of the Tennessean's impetuosity and of the gravity of the Florida situation.⁵⁸ The author also disproved the theory that Rhea's letter of January 12, 1818, might have carried the desired hint, because the time sequence did not make an answer possible. But, as Dangerfield remarked, "the general may not have been bothering about dates."⁵⁹ Thus, while this writer did not justify Jackson's movements, he nevertheless placed much of the blame on Monroe and Calhoun as well for failing to give proper attention to the matter.

In addition, several⁶⁰ other writers of the period failed to mention the controversy at all or did not express a view concerning the problem.

Thus, most of the writers of the past four decades have been reluctant to accept Jackson's statements that he had received a secret authorization from Monroe to seize Spanish Florida. Bassett, however, led the faction which believed that the general misinterpreted another letter from Rhea as the desired approval. Stenberg went to the other extreme, however, and stated that the "Rhea letter" was an invention by the Jacksonians in or about 1830. Most of the writers who expressed opinions felt that the Bassett theory was too generous to Jackson, but

⁵⁸George Dangerfield, The Era of Good Feeling (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1952), p. 140.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 139.

⁶⁰Joseph T. Blau (ed.), Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1947); Louis M. Hacker, The Shaping of the American Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1945); Leonard D. White, The Jacksonians: A Study in Administrative History, 1829-1861 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1954).

they were not as willing to indict the hero as was Stenberg. On the other hand, a number of the authors felt that Jackson had been justified in his actions in 1818, regardless of the implications of the alleged "Rhea letter." Their points of justification were basically the same as those expressed by earlier writers.⁶¹

⁶¹Refer to Chapter III, pp. 76-78.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study in historiography has dealt with the controversies that resulted from the invasion of Spanish Florida in 1818 by Jackson. After the tracing of the historical background of the affair, many viewpoints on the twin questions of the justification of Jackson and the existence of the "Rhea letter" were presented. To begin with, the views of Jackson and his major contemporaries were considered. Then, the opinions of biographers and historians from 1819 to 1956 were examined.

This chapter will summarize the views on these two major questions of the principal contemporaries and writers cited in the preceding chapters. Then, the groupings into which the historians have placed themselves will be pointed out, and some generalizations will be made concerning the methods by which certain authors apparently selected their particular positions on the questions. Also, some of the inconsistencies of their findings will be mentioned. In addition, the major contributions to the controversy will be cited. Finally, an effort will be made to indicate the changing trends in the viewpoints of writers during the different periods of history. This study, however, is in no way intended to bring about solutions to the questions of the justification of Jackson or the existence of the first "Rhea letter."

The contemporary defense of Jackson's 1818 invasion of Spanish Florida was erected along four main lines: 1) the comprehensive nature

of his orders; 2) the principle of self-defense; 3) the misconduct of some Spanish officials; and 4) the silence of the administration after the receipt of Jackson's proposal of January 6, 1818. Years later, a fifth factor was introduced; namely, that Jackson had received from Monroe, through the medium of Rhea, the desired authorization to seize all of East Florida.

On the other hand, the opponents of the hero not only refused to accept the foregoing reasons, but also condemned him for transcending his orders and violating the Constitution. In addition, several of Jackson's antagonists accused him of acting for personal gain. There was considerable evidence, however, that some of these men were motivated by their own political ambitions.

The defense of the general, emanating mainly from the House, was varied in nature. Jackson himself, at one time or another, used all five of the previously mentioned bases in explaining his movements. But his admirers were more prone to select one or two reasons than to use all of them. Thus, the discretionary nature of Jackson's orders was cited by Secretary of State Adams as well as by Poindexter and other Representatives. Several contemporaries emphasized the necessity of seizing the territory in order to insure peace and security for the frontier. Monroe, while never relenting from the conviction that Jackson had transcended his orders, later partially explained the actions of his general on the basis of self-defense. Others who pleaded this cause were Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Rhea, Lemuel Sawyer, David Walker, and many of the same congressmen who defended Jackson on the grounds of the comprehensiveness of his orders. Monroe, Adams, and Poindexter referred to the misconduct of the Spanish officials, while Crawford later said that

Jackson should have been absolved from blame because the administration failed to answer his letter of January 6. Only Rhea, Judge Overton, and Major Lee confirmed Jackson's story of the first "Rhea letter."

On the other hand, heavy opposition to Jackson came from the House as well as from the cabinet. In the cabinet meetings, Monroe, Calhoun, Crawford, and Wirt expressed the belief that the general had exceeded his authority, and, therefore, had violated the Constitution. This view was also expounded by Clay and several other Representatives. Also, Cobb and Fuller stated that the defense of Jackson on the basis of the law of self-defense was not warranted. Moreover, Lowndes and Fuller expressed the opinion that the general had acted in order to enhance his political stature.

While Jackson and a few of his followers professed in 1830-1831 that there had been a first "Rhea letter," Monroe was equally emphatic in denying the allegation. In this contention he was backed by his son-in-law and secretary, Samuel Gouverneur, as well as by Adams. Possibly because of the heated political situation, leading figures like Calhoun, Crawford, and Clay did not enter into the "Rhea letter" controversy.

Thus, it has been seen that the defense of Jackson in 1818-1819 was spearheaded by Adams in the cabinet and Poindexter in the House, as well as by the general himself. Actually, Jackson believed that his justification was obvious; therefore, he never truly recognized the service given him by Adams and others. This was partially responsible for his break with Adams which was opened after the election of 1824. On the other hand, the opposition to the general in 1818-1819 was led by Monroe, Calhoun, and Clay. Monroe and Calhoun, of course, later signified that they had changed their stands somewhat, but Clay remained an outspoken

critic of the general. Of the leaders in the discussions held immediately after the Seminole campaign, only Jackson professed that there had been a "Rhea letter." Monroe and Adams positively denied the claim, while Calhoun and Clay were silent on the question. It is significant to note that most of the biographers of these contemporary politicians merely reflected the views of their subjects.

The views of the biographers and historians should also be reviewed. The biographers of Jackson almost unanimously supported his contentions, with only two of these writers--Karsner and Ahl--dissenting. They mentioned numerous reasons for justification. The comprehensive nature of the War Department directives was cited by Frost, Brown, and Johnson. The necessity of protecting the frontier was used as the basis for their defense of Jackson by Waldo, Jenkins, Benton, and Syrett. In addition, Waldo and Brady argued that Jackson had been justified because of the misconduct of certain Spanish officials. Parton and Sumner stressed the failure of the administration to respond to Jackson's proposal of January 6, 1818. Parton also submitted the theory that perhaps there had been a "Rhea letter" which Monroe had unknowingly authorized. In 1916 Bassett introduced the interpretation that there had been a letter from Rhea to Jackson, but that it did not deal with the invasion of East Florida. This letter, which evidently referred to the channeling of all War Department orders through the division commander, apparently was misinterpreted by Jackson to contain the desired approval of his proposed plan for seizing the Spanish territory. Ogg and James later adopted the Bassett thesis. Of all the biographers of Jackson, only Buell (1904) indicated that the general had been justified by an actual "Rhea letter." Ward alleged that the evidence produced against

Jackson was insufficient to censure him. He believed, moreover, that the prosecution of Jackson had been based on political, rather than legal, grounds. Several writers did not express an opinion on the question of justification.

On the other hand, the biographers of Jackson's contemporaries were more divided in their opinions. Only four of these writers defended him. Von Holst, Clark and Bemis averred that Jackson was justified on account of the silence of the administration, while Schurz mentioned the principle of self-defense. On the other hand, several biographers were prone to condemn the general for violating his orders in order to increase his personal power. This view was expressed by Prentice, Sargent, Morse, Gilman, Shipp, and Wiltse. Colton merely believed that Jackson had been acquitted in the House because it would have been worse to bow down before the wishes of Spain. Cresson stated that the acquisition of the Floridas by diplomacy rather than by conquest had been necessary in order to preserve peace and remove the Indian menace. Several authors made no reference to the Florida affair.

The majority of the historians examined have tended to justify the chieftain. The principal reason cited by Hildreth and other early writers was the necessity of protecting the frontier settlers from additional Indian raids. On the other hand, Babcock offered the unusual observation that Jackson had been the innocent tool for the expansionistic plans of Monroe and Adams. In addition, McMaster suggested that Jackson had misinterpreted orders which were certainly comprehensive. This view was later advanced by Andrews, Channing, and Martin.

But Schouler, Stenberg, and Dangerfield condemned Jackson for his deeds. Schouler attacked all of the bases for justification offered by

the Jacksonians. Stenberg also believed that Jackson had seized Florida on his own initiative, for the purpose of "pressuring" the government into holding the territory. Thereby, according to Stenberg, the general would have greatly increased his popularity among the masses. Dangerfield simply said that there had been no necessity for the seizure of the garrisons. The other historians cited in the text did not express opinions.

Thus, on the question of justification, most of Jackson's biographers defended him, while the majority of the biographers of his contemporaries condemned him. Most of the historians justified the general, but the critics were much more vociferous than the defenders.

It is also interesting to note that the biographers of the major contemporaries of Jackson tended to look at him and his actions through the eyes of their subjects. Of the Monroe biographers examined, two--Gilman and Cresson--condemned the chieftain, while Styron did not offer an opinion. While most of the Adams writers, led by Clark and Bemis, defended the hero, only Morse took an opposite view. On the other hand, most of the biographers of Calhoun, Crawford, and Clay condemned Jackson for his Florida adventure. Van Buren's biographies revealed little, because the "Red Fox of Kinderhook" had cunningly kept as far removed from the controversy as was possible.

There have been some rather obvious trends in the viewpoints of the writers who have been examined. For example, the authors of the pre-World War I era spent more time discussing the justification of Jackson than have the later writers. Thirty-five authors from the early period and twenty-nine writers from 1914 to 1956 have been studied. In the first group, seventeen justified the general, seven condemned him,

and the rest had no opinion. In the latter group, eleven backed Jackson, six rejected his actions, and the remainder were silent. Thus, the percentage of writers who dealt with the problem was somewhat (ten percent) higher among the historians of the early period. While this can be attributed in part to the fact that no new interpretations had been developed in the field, some of the writers have undoubtedly chosen to minimize the affair as long as the interpretations have remained unchanged. Again, it must be said, the biographers and historians have tended to view the Florida affair virtually the same as it was seen by the major contemporaries.

The only new theories that have been presented have dealt with the "Rhea letter" phase of the controversy. The biographers of Jackson made some important contributions in this area. The early Jacksonian writers did not deal with the question because Jackson's side of the story was not fully known until 1854 when Benton printed his Thirty Years' View. But, in 1859, James Parton suggested that there might have been a "Rhea letter" which Monroe had unknowingly authorized. As was previously mentioned, however, the most influential interpretation was introduced by Bassett in 1916. He then suggested that there had been a letter written by Rhea to Jackson, but that it had dealt with an entirely different matter. When Bassett later uncovered the copy of a note written on January 12, 1818, by Rhea to Jackson, he was convinced that Jackson had misconstrued the intent of the missive. This letter, which was published in 1926, in his Correspondence of Andrew Jackson, read in part:

I expected that you would receive the letter you allude to, and it gives me pleasure to know you have it, for I was certain it would be satisfactory to you. You see by it the sentiments of the

Pres. [sic] respecting you are the same, as to me, I wish I could do you any good. I have also received your letter of the 22nd. last month, and read it carefully. I am gratified indeed that the plan of the Pres. [sic] is satisfactory to you. I am confident that he intended it to be so.¹

Bassett's influence has been reflected in the writings of several more recent biographers and historians, notably Ogg and James.

Of the biographers of Jackson's contemporaries, none accepted his "Rhea letter" story. MacKenzie, Wiltse, and Bemis said that it was an outright invention designed to assist Martin Van Buren in the struggle against Calhoun for the succession. Van Deusen asserted that the general's memory must have failed him, while Gilman, Styron, and Cresson simply stated that the "Rhea letter" had never existed. On the other hand, Clark and Coit reiterated Bassett's theory that Rhea had written a letter but that it referred to an entirely different matter. The remainder of the writers did not deal with the controversy.

Of the pro-Jackson historians, only Andrews mentioned the existence of the "Rhea letter," and he did not believe that the alleged letter was ever written. The anti-Jackson writers all attacked the Tennessean for his story, however. Schouler in 1884 asserted that the letter, which had never been authorized by Monroe, had been invented to complete the political discrediting of Calhoun. Stenberg in 1936 was more certain that the missive was a fabrication. Dangerfield in 1952 stated that Bassett's theory that Jackson had misconstrued Rhea's reference to another matter was disproved by a careful examination of the dates involved.

¹John Spencer Bassett (ed.), Correspondence of Andrew Jackson (6 vols.; Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1926-1935), II, 348.

Thus, the major contributions to the "Rhea letter" historiography have been made by Schouler and Bassett. While Schouler was not original in his opinion that the "Rhea letter" was a political fabrication, his extensive treatment of the controversy undoubtedly inspired the later research carried on by Stenberg and Dangerfield. On the other hand, Bassett's thesis concerning a letter written to Jackson by Rhea on January 12, 1818, has had considerable impact upon later writers. Some have explained that, while there was no real "Rhea letter," Jackson might have made an honest mistake. With these factors in view, several authors justified the general on the grounds that Monroe should have written a dissenting letter if Jackson's plans had not met with his approval.

While the writers of the 1819-1914 period have given more attention to the question of Jackson's justification than the later authors, the latter have been more concerned about the "Rhea letter." As the Jackson story was not known until 1854, the comparisons made will involve the 1854-1914 and 1914-1956 periods. Twenty-one authors from the early era and twenty-nine writers from the latter period were examined. In the first group, six asserted that there was no "Rhea letter," while fourteen had no opinion. Only one writer, Buell, claimed that there actually was a first "Rhea letter." In the latter era, fourteen wrote negative comments, while the rest failed to express views. Thus, of the early writers thirty-three percent had opinions, while of the latter group nearly half had viewpoints. This increase can undoubtedly be attributed to the influence of Schouler and Bassett.

There are some fascinating, inexplicable aspects that remain concerning the alleged "Rhea letter." First of all, why did Monroe allegedly

ignore Jackson's letter of January 6, 1818? Even the general's foremost critics have not been able to explain adequately why the President of the United States neglected to read a letter that dealt with Florida at a time when our government was negotiating for that territory. Moreover, the letter was from a commanding officer known for his impetuosity and disregard of legal niceties. Secondly, why did Jackson allegedly burn the "Rhea letter" without investigating the situation more thoroughly? Jackson insisted, of course, that he had trusted Monroe and Rhea. In addition, he pointed to a note in the margin opposite the letter of January 6, 1818, in his letterbook. This entry stated that the letter in question had been burned on April 12, 1818. Stenberg, however, believed that this note was fictitious. He asserted that whoever forged the entry in the letterbook made an error because the date should have been April 12, 1819.² Third, what was the true role played in the drama by John Rhea? In December, 1818, Rhea had indicated that he knew nothing about a "Rhea letter." As late as 1827, in response to a query from Monroe, Rhea assured the ex-President that they had not discussed Jackson and Florida in January, 1818.³ Yet, in 1831 he wrote to Monroe insisting that the Virginian had authorized him to tell Jackson to seize Florida. Widely differing views concerning this inconsistency have been presented. Bassett, of course, expounded the theory that Rhea had transmitted information to Jackson in 1818 which dealt with an

²Richard R. Stenberg, "Jackson's 'Rhea letter' Hoax," Journal of Southern History, II (November, 1936), 491.

³Stanislaus M. Hamilton (ed.), The Writings of James Monroe (7 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), VII, 139.

entirely different matter. Then, according to this writer, Rhea was too aged in 1831 to recall the particulars of the situation. But Dangerfield intimated in 1952 that the dates belied Bassett's theory, as Jackson's letter of January 6 could not have possibly reached Washington by January 12. Therefore, the critics of Jackson believed that Rhea, as a faithful follower, merely did what the Jacksonians ordered when he wrote the second "Rhea letter."

Thus, in spite of the recent revival of interest, the "Rhea letter" seems destined to remain an insoluble question. Even with Bassett's thesis, current opinion still reflects the forthright statement made in 1906 by Cyrus T. Brady: "Nobody can explain this matter satisfactorily now."⁴

Consequently, it appears that most historians and biographers have accepted the conclusion of the House of Representatives that Jackson was justified in his seizure of the Spanish posts in 1818. An even greater number of writers, however, have agreed that Jackson was mistaken in claiming that he had received a secret authorization from Monroe in February, 1818. This is true despite the recent efforts to defend the hero on the basis of Bassett's thesis.

Thus, many absorbing facets of Jackson's Florida adventure have been explored. While no definite conclusions have been made, it is hoped that, in some small way, this study will help to keep alive historical interest in this intriguing controversy.

⁴Refer to Chapter III, p. 64.

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